

# South Africa 2017

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## CHAPTER 1. TRANS-ATLANTIC PASSAGE

### Prelude in March – Four time zones

(Bert) Before we embark on worldwide travels we did a quick spin around the U.S. While I expect to see many lands and cultures this year, I am impressed at how diverse is our own country. In New Orleans at Mardi Gras a few weeks ago I saw more African Americans in the numerous parades—bugling trumpeters, loud drummers, quick-fingered clarinetists, bare-legged dancing girls, colorful Zulu characters—than I’ve seen in my lifetime. Last week, at a family wedding in Santa Barbara, California half the guests were Japanese Americans—including one born and raised in Maui—the other half mostly German Americans. Contrastingly, at our South Texas home 90% of the residents are Mexican American, mostly bilingual. A few days ago, we flew low over the densely-packed homes and businesses of Tucson, landing in a crossroads airport where people of myriad nationalities and backgrounds fanned across America. Ours took us to Miami. In a tour through Little Havana I saw more Cuban Americans than ever before and watched as they played dominoes and chess in a favorite over-55 outdoor court with colorfully tiled tables. In a two-decked bus with open air seating we toured past famous graffiti art decorated Miami buildings, past cloud-touching skyscrapers, huge yachts at harbor, and multi-million-dollar Coral Gable homes. In Palm Beach, my brother drove me past Donald Trump’s Mara Lago estate and equally plush seaside mansions before returning to middle class suburbia. We drove north to Jacksonville on a seemingly endless interstate without stops for hundreds of miles, past flat unpopulated lowlands of pine palmetto savannah. I visited the 500-year-old site of St. Augustine, the oldest house in America and the historic fort, from which Spanish ships set off for their return to Europe. Then we headed south again to Cape Canaveral, which was Cape Kennedy when we last visited and saw a rocket erupt into the stratosphere. Here at the cape is the Norwegian cruise ship which is the start of our voyage to Europe.



Mardi Gras, New Orleans



Santa Barbara, California



Miami, Florida



Graffiti art, Miami



Little Havana



Mar-a-Lago, Palm Beach



St. Augustine, Florida

## **Bird diversity, even before reaching South Africa**

(Bert) En route while crisscrossing the U.S., I kept track of birds, those easy to see in one corner of the nation, but nearly impossible to find in others. At our Mexican border home, not far from

The Wall, I leave behind Green Jays, Great Kiskadees, Paraques, and Plain Chachalacas. In New Orleans, it was Barred Owls hooting at our state park campground and Fish Crows along the Mississippi River. In Santa Barbara we beach walked along the Pacific Ocean, watching Western and Heerman's Gulls, Brants, Pelagic Cormorants, California Scrub-Jays, and Brewer's Blackbirds. In Miami it was strange to find both Cooper's Hawk and Sharp-shinned Hawk circling above the city. In West Palm Beach, a flock of squawking Monk Parakeets gained my attention. Driving north along the Florida coast I spotted Swallow-tailed Kite, Glossy Ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork, and Pileated Woodpecker. In Jacksonville, I heard an Eastern Whip-poor-will calling just after sunset. And, finally, at Cape Canaveral, Brown Pelicans dipped in the harbor near our moored cruise ship. Birdwise, it should be an interesting year.



Santa Barbara, California

## **Day 1 Starting from Cape Canaveral – Eastern U.S. time zone (UTC-5)**

(Shari) Oh, my gosh! This Norwegian cruise ship, Epic, is huge, huge, huge. Fifteen stories, plus 3 more open decks above that! Marsha tells us it is the third biggest cruise ship. We are in the 9<sup>th</sup> story with a balcony room. Ooh la la! I ask the luggage porter how many people are on the ship. She says we are full with about 4500 souls. She and I both thought this trans-Atlantic cruise would be less than half full. We grab a bite to eat and I peruse the lengthy activity list just for this afternoon. I put down the list and decide I need a nap. Soon it's time to meet the rest of the group for dinner. We have a reserved table for 12. Another 10 will meet us in South Africa. The dinner is delicious and after logging it into my calorie tracker, I find I ate enough to gain a

half pound. Oh, no! This is going to be hard. All the drinks we want and all the food. We decide to wear off some dinner by walking up the three flights of stairs to our room instead of the taking the elevator. We'll need much more than that. Right now it is 12:30 AM and I am outside on the balcony listening to the waves and watching the moon. Someone pinch me please.

(Bert) Although most of our traveling friends—or at least those that join us on RV caravans—have taken an ocean cruise, we have not. We have often driven our RV unto ferries for short hauls or several days, but we've not traveled in the luxury of an ocean liner. Even from a half-mile away the enormity of the ship draws our attention. Running the gauntlet of stops, we consume more than an hour getting aboard: rental car dropoff, receipt pickup, shuttle to ship, dump off tagged luggage, ticket checkpoint, passport checkpoint, security checkpoint, ship room card and ID registration, photo security, a quarter-mile gangplank, elevator to 9th floor, keyless room entry. Finally, we stand on our balcony overlooking the gauntlet we just ran. Four hours later our baggage arrives at the room just before we head to the Manhattan dining room to meet fellow travelers bound for South Africa. Introductions all around, hugs for the ones we know from prior travels, and soon we are seated at a table set for twelve. Conversations flow easily during our leisurely two-and-a-half-hour dinner. Needless to say, everyone is excited about the start of an adventure.



View from our balcony of mechanized “gangplank”





From our ship balcony while moored at Cape Canaveral harbor



Dining at Manhattan Room



Two-story chandelier at ship center – largest crystal LED chandelier ever designed

## **Day 2 At sea – Havana, Haiti, Chetumal, Quito and Eastern U.S. time zone (UTC-5)**

(Shari) I can't say I slept like a baby but not because the seas were rough. I don't sleep good anymore, period. At midnight I am on the balcony enjoying the night sky and an occasional passing ship. At 3 AM I am on the balcony again enjoying the night sky and listening to the waves. Seas are very, very calm and temps are balmy.

(Bert) Time zones have changed so much in the last few days, I wake up at 5 AM west coast time, 8 AM Florida time, and I'm not sure what here at sea. I look out from the balcony at a sea so calm I barely see a ripple, although from nine floors up, a 2-ft. roll might seem flat. No whitecaps, though. Shari is still asleep when I go to the 18<sup>th</sup> floor and explore the top of the ship. Hardly anyone is up and about. Looking down on the 15<sup>th</sup> deck, the lounge chairs are stacked ten high and a steward begins setting them up in parallel, three long rows deep on each side of the deck. I've read there are 2395 lounge chairs on the top deck.



A Rock Dove perches on a railing. Strange! Is it a stowaway? We are 220 miles from Florida and have passed no islands in sight. My presence scares the dove and it climbs high above me and heads to sea off the starboard side, eventually disappearing in the clouds. It flies in the direction of the Bahamas, but can it fly that far?



Other than the stowaway dove, I have seen no other birds. I'm surprised at their complete absence. However, during an 11 AM announcement from the captain he tells us the sea depth here is 15,800 ft., not an environment conducive to surface fish and therefore no bait for seabirds. The captain reports the air temperature is 73° and the water is even warmer at 77°. Kids crowd the swimming pools and take turns sliding down a three story waterslide, the longest at-sea slide in the world (there are multiple slides for a total length of 761 ft.). I'll have to try the pool early tomorrow morning before they arrive, but I'm not sure about trying the slide.



Swimming pool and water slide



(Shari) Bert and I go to the 15th floor for a breakfast buffet with so many choices. I have eggs Benedict and French toast with banana sauce plus bacon and ham. Then I go to Deck 5 and make four loops around the jogging track for a mile of exercise. Back at the room I plan our day's entertainment and add it to my iPhone calendar so I don't miss some comedy act or play or talk. We attend a lecture on Spanish influence in the Americas and then eat lunch. I go easy and only have a plate full of salad. We walk around Deck 15 and marvel at the swimming pools and water slide that must be three stories high. People shoot down it on an inner tube. Bobby has reserved a room every day for us from 2 to 4. Today he shows a movie following the lives of a family of cheetahs and a pride of lions, "Cats of Africa." We are getting in the mood for Africa. I must say National Geographic put together a great show adding human emotions to the animals.

Dinner and a comic juggler finish our day. The ship has started a gentle rocking back and forth even with no white caps on the water. I can ignore it mostly but am surprised such a little bit of wave affects this monstrous ship.



Flat sea 6 PM

### **Day 3 At sea – Caracas, Santiago, Turks & Caicos and Atlantic Canada time zone (UTC-4)**

(Bert) I'm up by 7 AM, put on my swimming suit, and head to the open-air 15<sup>th</sup> deck. Nets cover the two swimming pools and I'm told they do not open until 8 AM. I return at 8 and now the wave pool is uncovered. The water feels chilly, probably in the 70s, when I climb into the pool. This is not a pool that propels the water mechanically. Instead, it is the shape of the pool that pushes waves onto a broad gently sloped area to one side of the deep pool. The rocking motion of the ship propels water in and out of the higher plane, creating forceful waves in the deeper pool. I try to swim laps, moving rapidly when riding the wave and making no progress when swimming upstream. I do a dozen laps and decide I've done enough in these torrential waves.



Deck 15



Wave pool

I've been sitting on our room balcony, often reading a book, but also keeping my eye on the sea. The first half-hour passes without wildlife sightings, as did yesterday. Then at 10:43 AM I see a Brown Booby fly the length of the ship. I get my binoculars on the bird and retreat inside to get my camera with its long lens. At 11:08 I'm ready when a second Brown Booby slowly wings past me and snap a dozen photos.



Brown Booby



5:25 PM, looking west toward setting sun



## **Day 4 Bermuda – Greenland, Saint Pierre & Miquelon, and Buenos Aires time zone (UTC-3)**

(Bert) From bed, anxious to see our approach to Bermuda, I look to the balcony window and see night darkness still shrouds the purplish sea, but distant lights dot the horizon. I take a few more winks of sleep and then get dressed and retreat to the 16<sup>th</sup> level where a wide catwalk edges the ship's mid stern flanks, a great photo shoot for passing scenery. At 5:50 AM we meet a peninsula pinnaled by St. David's Lighthouse with its beams lighting the way since 1879. Lights illuminate windows of pastel painted houses—pink, yellow, and blue—capped with white limestone roofs, the homes tiered on the steep hillsides.



St. David's Lighthouse, Bermuda



St. David's Lighthouse, Bermuda

Minutes later, following the coastline, batteries of cannons point toward the sea from Fort St. Catherine as we round another point and then head through open water carefully churning between successions of red or green flanking buoys.



Fort St. Catherine, Bermuda



Fort St. Catherine, Bermuda

(Bert) A few minutes before 8 AM we are right on schedule when we reach Heritage Wharf. Here the agile ship rotates 180° without moving forward or backward, aligning itself so the bow points to sea.



National Museum of Bermuda



Norwegian Epic docked at Heritage Wharf, Bermuda

During the long time it takes for the ship to nestle into the wharf, tie down, and begin disembarking the first of the 4100 passengers, I watch with binoculars and camera from our balcony. Most enthralling are the White-tailed Tropicbirds that wing above the historic National Museum of Bermuda and over the Royal Naval Dockyard. Like wayward kites they cavort above me, trailing long white tail plumes..



White-tailed Tropicbirds winging over the Royal Naval Dockyard



White-tailed Tropicbirds



White-tailed Tropicbird

(Shari) Today is a shore excursion in Bermuda. When I wake up, Bert tells me he's been up for 2 hr. and has already eaten breakfast. I guess this is not our honeymoon. We are just coming in to dock so I quickly dress and eat. Finally, like herds of cattle, all are allowed to debark. What

should we do? Take a taxi, tour bus, scooter, or bike? We choose to bike but these old legs won't lift high enough to get over the bars of the men's bikes available. Second choice it is. The city bus starts from this end of the island. The nice lady driver tells us to get our tokens in the craft mall. For the next two hours we marvel at the scenery. I have a very informative man sitting next to me and he tells us all about the island for half the ride: 21 mi., vacation homes of Kirk Douglas and Ronald Reagan; white roofs on ALL buildings to purify the water running into the cisterns underneath the structures; only one car allowed per household; everything very expensive. I am sorry he had to get off. We get off 30 min. later at the very last stop.

(Bert) We walk from the dock toward a rental shop with the intention of renting bicycles, but find they only have men's style and Shari cannot swing her leg over the bar. Plan B is the city bus and for US\$18 we buy two round-trip passes that will take us the bulk of the day traversing the island from the wharf to St. George and back. The bus drivers must be former race car drivers as they accelerate along narrow, sidewalk less streets, rounding sharp curves and skirting stone walls and tall neatly trimmed hedges. We get frequent views of the turquoise blue bays, white sandy beaches, and attractive pastel-colored hillside homes, some of which certainly qualify as multi-million-dollar mansions.



Royal Naval Dockyard



Victoria Park in Hamilton



Alluring water color

(Bert) After a couple of hours winding through the wooded parks and green golf courses of Somerset, the city shopping streets of Hamilton, and many beaches near Harrington Sound, we reach the terminus at St. George's Island, connecting by a one-lane bridge. We get off the bus near the obelisk commemorating Sir George Somerset for his role in the settlement founded in 1609.





Memorial to Sir George Somerset in St. George, Bermuda

Shari and I walk a few blocks to an ice cream shop that offers free Wi-Fi and for the first time since leaving Florida we collect our e-mail. While connections are available on board the cruise ship, so far we have resisted the \$1 per minute service. On the return trip Shari and I discuss what we would do in Bermuda if we had another day. I'd head to the nature preserve at Somerset which I have been told is a hotspot during migration. As it is, I have seen no migrants and just typical resident city birds. An exception is the bird the locals call kiskadee. This one has me puzzled as our South Texas local bird is the Great Kiskadee and the Bermuda bird looks much smaller and with a diminutive head. Also, its call (and shape) resembles Social Flycatcher. Nonetheless, my bird software also calls it Great Kiskadee. The ice cream shop owner tells me the bird was introduced to Bermuda and it has nearly eliminated the native lizard population. I have seen and heard about a dozen of these kiskadees. By far the most numerous bird, though, is European Starling.



European Starling

(Shari) Finding an ice cream shop with free Wi-Fi we eat our lunch. This shop has a clever idea. Choosing our ice cream, Bailey's Irish cream for me, we scoop our own desired toppings and then pay the price based on weight. Mine is \$6.45. Taking the scenic route back we pass gorgeous beaches and fancy homes. We still have 2 hr. to kill before we must be back on the ship so Bert and I separate. I walk the shops and guess what he does? Of course, he birds. Yup, the honeymoon is definitely over. Meeting the others for dinner, we talk about our day. Many rented a taxi and spent \$50 per person for the same tour we got for \$9. After dinner we choose to see a comedian for tonight's entertainment.

## **Day 5 At sea – Coordinated Universal Time zone (UTC-2)**

(Bert) Yesterday we traveled in the Greenland time zone, although we are far to the south of that island and at Bermuda. Today we are in the "Coordinated universal time zone," a no-man's-land in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Somewhat appropriately, we attend a lecture about the lost continent Atlantis, mentioned by Plato. While my expectation of the lecture was to learn what scientific research has revealed about the location of this perhaps mythical island, the professor and art institute director dealt more with art than science. However, it seems unlikely we are now cruising over Atlantis since the sea depth here is 15,000 ft.



Today's ship location

(Shari) It's a tough life but somebody's going to do it. We kind of worked into a daily routine. Get up, get dressed, eat breakfast, walk around for exercise, go to a talk, eat lunch, take a nap to recover from our mornings activities or read, watch a movie, eat dinner, go to a show. It's a tough day. We could play bridge or basketball, go bowling, gamble or shop, get a manicure or haircut, swim or do treadmill, play TV show games like "I want to be a millionaire", line dance, rock climb, bungee jump, listen to music at the piano bar. Every minute something is going on. But you know even with over 4000 people on board, it does not seem crowded.

(Bert) After breakfast I take to the jogging trail, although my "jog" is a fast walk, I finish four times around the loop for one mile. With all the great food we have been eating, three full meals whereas I usually get by with two, I should be exercising more. By no means does the jogging trail stretch the length of the ship. I learn a few facts about the ship when I go to the bridge viewing room on Deck 13. The ship is 1081 ft. long, 133 ft. wide and has 18 levels. Diesel electric engines propel it at 22 knots which is significantly faster than the smaller 10-deck cruise ship we passed this morning while we ate breakfast. The crew numbers 1708, all with name tags noting their country of origin, which is predominately Indonesia and The Philippines. The staff cares for our every need, including serving 20,370 meals each day.



Norwegian Epic



Norwegian Epic



Norwegian Epic

## **Day 6 At sea – Azores & Cabo Verde Island time zone (UTC+0)**

(Bert) While I wait for Shari to wake up, I sit on the balcony reading my book. The sun has pierced the horizon, though the overcast clouds keep the skies dismal gray and the calm seas gloomily darker. On the upside, the seas are soothingly calm without whitecaps and the temperatures continue in the high 60s and low 70s, so a light sweatshirt suffices comfortably. Periodically I glance up from my book to search for seabirds, not having seen any since the two Brown Boobies a few days ago. Near the horizon I spy what looks like a single radio antenna tower. We are over 400 mi. from the Azores, so what could I be seeing? I go inside and retrieve my binoculars and identify the tall mast of a sailboat. It is too distant—at the height of our balcony room, the horizon is 12 miles distant—to make out any activity on board and the sailboat seems to be drifting in the same direction of the cruise ship. I am reminded of movies about abandoned ships at sea, all occupants missing or dead. I doubt that is the case today, but it does surprise me that someone would choose to sail on the open seas so far from any islands.



Tall mast barely visible on the horizon



Zeroing in on the sailboat just as the rising sun illuminates its mast



Over 400 miles from shore, 12 miles from my balcony

Each day at 10 AM National Geographic and History Channel movies are being shown in the 600-seat Epic Theater. Today it was on historical Magellan and recent attempts to find the remnants of one of the ships that sank in the Straits of Magellan off the tip of South America. I recall some of the stories from childhood, but not those of protesting seamen ready to mutiny, sexual exploits at Rio de Janeiro, the loss of one ship with all but one sailor hiking overland to join the others, and of Magellan's death in battle before he completes his round-the-world journey. The modern day salvage attempt fails to find the ship, but they do find the exact beach where the sailors hiked through the steep cliffs and inland.

## **Day 7 At sea – Dublin, Edinburgh, Lisbon, London time zone (UTC+1)**

(Shari) We seem to move the clocks forward an hour every night. I am tired when I wake up this morning. So after breakfast and attending a movie on Christopher Columbus I take a nap before lunch. Such a hard life, I know. After a light lunch of salad I go to a John Wayne movie "Hatari." It is good and funny even if old. Bert wants to eat Indian food for dinner at the cafe buffet. I prefer a more leisurely dinner with conversation with the group at a restaurant called "Taste," a fancier place. Little neck clams, cream of carrot soup, grilled salmon, and chocolate decadence are on my menu. Plus a Champaign type wine called Borseco? And Irish coffee. A few in the group are bored and think there are too many days at sea. Not me. I have not even opened my needlepoint bag and have only read 30 pages in my book. I have been too busy. As I walk through the atrium, Paolo is singing his heart out and playing the guitar so I sit down and listen before retiring to my room for the night.

(Bert) Today's movie is on Christopher Columbus's several voyages to America. While these stories are more familiar, the Atlantic voyage takes on more meaning as we are also crossing the ocean. On his first voyage, after endless days and nights, his crew wanted to turn around. Only the force of Columbus's determination and navigation skills kept them together. We know where our cruise ship is headed and we can use a GPS to track our location, yet looking out at the limitless sea from every direction on the ship we see nothing but water. No birds or sea life hint of nearby land. Our progress is nearly 20 mph (17 knots) while theirs was a fifth of that, only about 100 miles per day. We have been at sea now for six days, two days since Bermuda (missed by Columbus) with over two thousand miles remaining to Barcelona, Spain. We have abundant food supplies, comfortable quarters, electronic communications, and generous entertainment opportunities (magicians, comics, opera singer). From our balcony at night I can watch the sea and stars, perhaps the only experience I share with the Columbus sailors.



The sea at night

## **Day 8 At sea – Brussels, Copenhagen, Madrid, Paris time zone (UTC+2)**

(Bert) At 11 AM the ship captain announces our current position as N34° 26' W31° 41', about 325 mi. from the Azores. On my computer I bring up Google Earth, which works even without an Internet connection, and chart my position and locate the islands to the southeast. The captain says we are still cruising at 17 knots (19.5 mph) and that we have traveled 1700 mi. since Bermuda. The waves are 3 ft., the air temperature is 61° and the water almost the same at 60°. He reminds us to set our clocks forward again tonight.

The captain's announcement precedes Lenore's talk today on Spain and Portugal. I've attended several of her talks and always learn something, but putting the thoughts together in a cohesive



manner apparently is a task for the listener, not the speaker. It is if someone jumbles up her slides randomly and she speaks to whatever comes up next on the screen in front of her. So, rereading my notes I see I jotted down: (1) before Columbus, Bartsch was the first to depict the world as a sphere although with almost no detail; (2) Canary Islands were not named after a bird, but rather a dog *Canis*; (3) Magellan died April 1521 in the Philippines; (4) Henry the Navigator of Portugal started explorations with funds supplied by the Knights Templar (Society of Christ); (5) Vasco da Gama sailed from Portugal to India under the sponsorship of Manuel I; (6) the Moorish architecture of the Iberian Peninsula includes rounded arches; (7) the Armillary sphere of Ptolemy shows the Earth as the center of the universe; (8) dying clothing red was a separate guild since this precious color was used exclusively by the clergy and royalty; (9) there is a Picasso exhibition in Malaga. Then she said something about a long-departed art exhibit in New York City, but I could not figure out the context of that remark, so did not write it in my notebook. With that she ran out of slides, so called an end to her presentation.

Later I find the ship's extensive library, arranged in glass-doored wall cabinets by subject and author. I'm here because I finished my current novel and looking for something else to read. Unfortunately, all of these books must be returned and I'm not sure I can finish another 450 page book. Then I find a small selection of exchange books and am delighted to swap my book for Paul Halpern's "Einstein's Dice & Schrodinger's Cat." Perhaps not one that most people would be anxious to read, but for me it reminds me of my math minor in college, especially statistical mechanics, and my quantum mechanics in chemistry graduate school, and of course the other Einstein books I've read. Perhaps I will finally comprehend his general theory of relativity and his attempts to find a unified theory of physics. We'll see.

(Shari) In spite of taking vitamins, it looks like I contracted a cold. My throat is raw and I have a tickle that makes me cough. So after a light breakfast I go back to bed and sleep until 3 PM. My throat still hurts so I buy some cough drops and stop off at the bar for a medicinal drink. One nice thing about getting a free drink package is I can try all sorts of libations without the danger of being stuck with bottles of liquor I don't like. My drink of choice today is a bushwacker. It tastes like a chocolate malt and goes down easy but does not take the hurt away. The drink package if paid for is \$80 per day. No way could we drink that much and I figure I get \$30 a day worth. But it's nice when it's free. We also got \$50 of ship credit which we are using for Internet at \$0.95 per minute. Because I do not want to spread my germs to the group, we eat alone at Shanghai, a Chinese restaurant. But the absolute highlight of the day is Vox Ventura, a group of four black men that sing as one well-tuned instrument. They reached the finalists in Britain has talent. I can only wonder who beat them. We are so enamored that we buy one of their CDs. Others had the same idea as they ran out of the recordings.

(Bert) In the evening we attend one of the best concerts I've heard in years. The four singers were runners up in the show Britain Has Talent, a parallel to America Has Talent. The group is called Vox Fortura and their forte is popular opera as well as a great variety of other strong vocal selections. I recognize all the songs, but cannot always remember the titles. We hear a selection from Carmen, Old Man River, the opera song Celine Dion sang with Luciano Pavarotti, Some Enchanted Evening, and a touching solo with the key phrase "Let him live, bring him home." After an hour of singing they finished too soon for the 800 people in the audience and got a

spontaneous standing ovation. Following an encore, the audience was again on their feet and applauding. I met the group at the exit and purchased a CD which the four of them autographed.



Vox Fortura

## **Day 9 At sea – Brussels, Copenhagen, Madrid, Paris time zone (UTC+2)**

(Bert) At 11 AM the captain announces our location at sea at N33°34' W32°9', having traveled 220 mi. since the island of Madeira and 2090 mi. since Bermuda. We have 339 mi. to reach our next stop at Funchal. Sea depth is 16,000 ft., it is overcast, and the waves are up to 5 ft. Air temperature is 59° and sea temperature is 68°. As has been the case all previous days, our cruise is very smooth and except for hearing the distant sound of the diesel engines, it is hard to tell we are not docked at shore. I've been watching the sea, rarely with any white caps, and completely absent of birds. On ferries in the past, I have almost always been in continuous sight of birds. Certainly this was the case for both ferry routes between Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, and it was for the very long ferry from Dutch Harbor to Kodiak along the Aleutian Chain of Alaska. On the ferries connecting Haines, Alaska to Washington State not only are birds plentiful, but also whales.



The sea at 2:15 PM

## **Day 10 Funchal, Madeira, Portugal – Brussels, Copenhagen, Madrid, Paris time zone (UTC+2)**

(Bert) The first thing I learn is that “fun” in Funchal is pronounced “foon”, yet it is certainly a fun city to visit: a Mediterranean style town with colorful houses built on a very steep mountainside. The steep slope is certainly apparent when I get up at 5 AM to photograph the city as our ship arrives at port. Another ship, the Seabourn Quest, glides silently past us, snugly fitting between our dock and the harbor shore. Later I see the ship far at sea. Two other ships are docked here, so probably 8000+ passengers will be in the city today.



Funchal, 5 AM



Seabourn Quest leaving Funchal 5:15 AM



Funchal, 7:17 AM

(Shari) Five days at sea and I missed them. I slept most of the time hoping I would be able to go ashore in Funchal, Portugal. I almost don't go this morning as I still fell lousy. We take a hop-on hop-off bus and see much of the city. I never knew it is situated on an island of very many hills. Up down around and up we go to the viewpoint at the top. Our ship in the harbor below looks like a toy. This tour was not as nice as the one in Miami as there was no live tour guide and the recorded information was scant. Nevertheless I am happy I went but soon after dinner I go back to bed.

(Bert) After breakfast—with a marvelous view of the city from the 15<sup>th</sup> level—we walk into the city, passing very steep sheer cliffs above which flies a raptor. I quickly switch to my 400mm lens and photograph the Eurasian Kestrel atop a tall pine-like tree.



Eurasian Kestrel, Funchal

I buy tickets to the Hop-on Hop-off bus and we tour the city as well as ride as far up the mountain as buildings continue, a place appropriately called Monte. Unlike Bermuda where all the homes are pastel with white roofs, here every house is white and covered with orange tiles. Buildings only cover the sloped mountainsides, leaving barren the sheer sides that precipitate to the sea.





Funchal

We see a harbor for fishing boats which you might think is a principal occupation for an island population. However, not counting recent tourism income, the main resource is agriculture. The lowest elevation has a subtropical climate where they grow bananas, specializing in a unique miniature form sold in Europe. At mid elevation they grow the famous grapes used for Madeira wine which Shari later samples at a famous wine merchant's headquarters. The highest elevation is the temperate zone where cherry trees are grown. It is near this elevation that we get off the bus to have lunch at the very old restaurant Bello Monte. Through the windows of the second story dining room we have a good view of the cathedral, Nossa Senhora do Monte ("Our Lady of Monte"), rebuilt after the earthquake of 1818.



Fishing harbor in Funchal



Shari sampling 15-year-old Madeira





Bello Monte



Nossa Senhora do Monte

Rock Pigeons are omnipresent in villages and cathedrals and I photograph a white one resting near the statue of Nossa Senhora. This more mountainous area has many old trees and colorful floral gardens. I hear a familiar fluid song and capture the European Blackbird in mid song. Although called a blackbird it is really a thrush, just as our American Robin is really a thrush.



Rock Pigeon resting on cathedral



European Blackbird



Bird of Paradise

We reboard the Hop-on Hop-off bus for the downhill trip and board the ship, stopping briefly for me to photograph amorous Yellow-legged Gulls.



Norwegian Epic followed by German AIDAbleu



Yellow-legged Gulls

## **Day 11 At sea – Brussels, Copenhagen, Madrid, Paris time zone (UTC+2)**

(Bert) The History Channel movie today was the Spanish Armada invasion of England. I knew a lot of this history from the movie on Elisabeth I, but I learned much more. Hero of the story from the English perspective was pirate and slave runner Sir Francis Drake in the employ of Elisabeth. I learned how ill prepared were the Spanish and the most astounding fact was the recent discovery of sunken armada that showed many of the ships were equipped with canons without matching cannon balls, thus only capable of one shot.

From the movie I quickly went to the Comedy Club where Lenore had another lecture. Again, her talk is disjointed, but insightful nonetheless. Most interesting is about Picasso of Málaga, where we will be tomorrow, 345 mi. as per the captain at his 11 AM announcement. I'll say more about Picasso tomorrow when we visit the museum. The captain also mentions we will be passing the Rock of Gibraltar in the middle of the night. I set the alarm for 2:40 AM.

I awake shortly before midnight, long before the alarm sounds. From the balcony, the cruise ship *Konigsdam* is brightly lit in chains of white lights. Far in the distance I can see the coast of Spain, very dimly lit on the horizon.



Cruise ship Konigsdam at 11:50 PM

I awake again, without the alarm, at 2 AM. This time I get dressed and go to the 15<sup>th</sup> floor for better views from both sides of the ship. There about a dozen of us trying to get our bearings and locate the Rock of Gibraltar. At 2:45 AM we are in agreement and I take a series of photos. The Konigsdam, which previously passed us, is now keeping pace with us. On the leeward side are the coastal lights of Morocco, Africa, perhaps 3-4 mi. distant. On the starboard side, 5 nautical miles distant, is Gibraltar. A vivid string of lights mark the shoreline, broken occasionally by a cluster of lights from docked ships. The glow of the city illuminates the rough edges of the Rock of Gibraltar and especially the nearly vertical right edge. Lights above the shoreline climb partly up the rock. Much of this is not particularly obvious with the naked eye, but discernable through my binoculars and camera. Tomorrow I will edit the photos to brighten and sharpen them.



Coast of Spain at 11:50 PM



Coast of Spain near Gibraltar at 2:49 AM



Coast of Morocco at 2:51 AM



Rock of Gibraltar at 2:59 AM outlined by the city lights of Gibraltar



Sharp right edge of Rock of Gibraltar at 3:09 AM

## **Day 12 Málaga, Spain – Brussels, Copenhagen, Madrid, Paris time zone (UTC+2)**

(Bert) Here's another city to learn to pronounce in the Spanish way. Accent is on the first syllable, "MAA laa gaa." I learned the history of the city in the basement of the Picasso Museum. It might seem strange that this history unfolded in the basement, but that is because during its construction ancient ruins were unearthed. Here I see the remains of a Phoenician home dating to end of the 7th Century B.C. adjacent to the rests of basins of a Roman factory for salting fish, active from 3rd to 5th Century A.D.

It was founded by the Phoenicians ca. 8th Century B.C., from the 6th Century B.C., the city was dominated by the Punics until they were conquered by the Romans at the end of the 3rd Century B.C. Next it was occupied by the Visigoths and later abandoned. Then in 711 it fell into the hands of the Arabs. Starting in the 10<sup>th</sup> century it was part of the Moorish kingdom of Granada. The Catholic Monarchs captured Málaga in 1487.





Remains of a Phoenician home dating to end of the 7th Century B.C.

(Shari) Today is the highlight of the cruise. I feel better and am mostly over my cold. The weather is picture perfect and our tours are great. After breakfast we grab a bus to town and then walk to the Picasso museum. He was born here and his family left his personal collection of art to the city. Containing 12 galleries arranged in chronological order, we walk through them with a self-guided audio tour. I am not an art student but I do like Picasso in his simplicity.

(Bert) I wish I could take photos of the Picasso artwork, but museum staff in each room stop photographers. Since these were a private family collection I have seen none of them before. We often think of Picasso as a painter of drawings, but he has much sculpture work as well, including objects made of diverse materials. One that fascinates me and its story is so simple anyone could do it, but didn't have the imagination. Picasso was returning from the funeral of a friend when he glanced down to see a broken and discarded bicycle. He picked up the handlebars and the seat and took them home to weld them together and paint the unit black. He is well known for drawing bulls, and this piece is immediately recognizable. Although I could not photograph it I found it decorating coffee cups in the gift store.



Copy of Picasso's bicycle bull

Now that we have reached mainland, I'm seeing European birds. Most surprising, though, is the flocks of Monk Parakeets, perhaps escaped cage birds that have become established as happened in Texas.



Monk Parakeet

(Shari) After the museum we meet the group for our Segway tour. How fun! At first I did not think I could balance but it was surprisingly easy to learn and becomes second nature in little time. We go to the top of a lookout point that I never would have walked to or biked to. All I had to do to climb the incline was lean forward. Amazing! The view is breathtaking. Afterwards we get Internet at a restaurant and sip Sangria. Before we know it our time to go back to the ship is near. It has been a long day but don't pinch me as I fear I may wake up.



Segway tour through Málaga



Málaga with cruise ship in background and bullfight arena in foreground



Our group dressed in safety jackets while Segwaying to top of city hills

## **Day 13 At sea – Brussels, Copenhagen, Madrid, Paris time zone (UTC+2)**

(Bert) At another of Lenore's lectures we hear about Barcelona, City of Genius. This topic is her forte as she has visited the city several times and the subject is art and architecture. Specifically, we hear about Gaudí, Picasso, Miró, and Dali. When we arrive in Barcelona tomorrow, I most want to see the unfinished church designed by Gaudi.

The captain's 11 AM announcement says we have 210 mi. left to reach our destination, we are traveling at 15 mph, and now the water depth here in the Mediterranean Sea is only 400 ft. with a water temperature of 64°. Still no seabirds in sight, but I do see a dolphin. Shari is feeling much better and is celebrating with a fluted glass of champagne while standing at the railing of our balcony.



Shari celebrating on our balcony



The sea at 8:30 PM

## **Day 14 Barcelona, Spain – Brussels, Copenhagen, Madrid, Paris time zone (UTC+2)**

(Bert) I'm again up early, about 4:30 AM, to watch the Epic maneuver into the port of Barcelona. The passageway is narrow for this big ship and, amazingly, the ship does a 180 in a small opening near shore and faces the ship seaward.



Maneuvering into Barcelona harbor at 4:30 AM

(Shari) Today is the end of our cruise. Boo hoo! We are up at dawn as we need to be packed and ready to go by 8:30. Sharing a taxi with Donna and Paul we drive to Hotel Gaudí. We can't check into our room yet so we store the luggage and take off for another Hop-on Hop-off bus tour of the city. I never knew Barcelona was so beautiful. It is a city that people work as well as live in. Apartment buildings are all over, each with a unique architecture. Most are 4 to 10 units wide and each with balconies, many sporting potted flowers and plants. It is quite beautiful.



Unique apartment buildings in Barcelona

(Bert) Our hotel is across the narrow one-lane street from Palau Güell by Antoni Gaudí. This famous building is ornately decorated with metal and concrete objects drawn from nature. Most unusual is the roof which we can see from the spacious balcony of Bobby and Marsha's 4<sup>th</sup> floor room.



Metal dragon ornately attached to wall of Palau Güell





Whimsical turrets atop Palau Güell by Gaudí



Bobbi & Marsha's balcony overlooking the roof of Palau Güell

(Shari) The city's architecture is dominated by many famous artists, Gaudí being the most notable and Miró, a name I just learned. Whimsical turrets on tops of buildings, the use of color, and a huge unfinished cathedral are interesting.



Huge outdoor sculpture by Miró

(Bert) Undoubtedly the most notable architecture in Barcelona is the Sagrada Família Basilica designed by Gaudí. It is unfinished and probably will not be finished for decades, long since Gaudí's death in 1926. Multiple spires reach to the clouds, Biblical scenes depict the sides, nature's creatures adorn corners and pillars. One might call some of Gaudí's works as gaudy and even think the word derived from the designer, but "gaudy" was actually in use at least a half century before Gaudí was born.



Sagrada Família Basilica designed by Gaudí



Main entrance to Sagrada Família Basilica



Biblical scenes on outside walls of Sagrada Família Basilica

(Shari) Outside cafes are everywhere, each advertising tapas. Tapas are little amounts of anything imaginable and not just chicken wings and meat balls. We found this neat little place on my iPhone app Yelp and ordered dinner. A bit of green bean salad, some fried squid, a small amount of oxtail stew, smoked fish over mashed potatoes, tiramisu, beer and wine and two other things I can't remember. Each little dish is between \$5 and \$10 so before we know it we've spent \$70. Delicious!



Bar Cañete, restaurant in Barcelona

## **Day 15 Barcelona, Spain – time zone (UTC+2)**

(Shari) After putting our luggage in storage again we continue our Hop-on Hop-off bus tour. Bert wants to revisit the museum at the top of a hill with a terrific view of the city below. We retrace yesterday's route and now the city makes more sense. I finally got my geographic bearings. I wish I had more time here as there is so much to visit.

(Bert) On yesterday's bus I noticed a stop with an incredible view of Barcelona and I want to go back for photos. We stop today at Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. Hordes of other tourists are visiting as well, many sitting in the sun, listening to a guitarist. Shari visits a gift store while I photograph the city. I see the huge fountain at the base of the hill and the bullfight stadium, but as I scan the city I cannot find the basilica. Rather than continuing on the bus, we decide to walk back to the hotel since it is only a bit over two miles. When we get to another viewpoint I spot the basilica in the far distance. Its tall spires rise far above the other city buildings.

(Shari) At 2 PM we catch a cab to the airport where we are to start a marathon flight to Doha and then Johannesburg. Poor Bert has to lug our two very heavy duffle bags a block up the road to the taxi stand. Luckily we get a cab right away.



Breakfast view of the market in process of being set up



Nacional d'Art de Catalunya

Museu



View from Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya



View from Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya with Sagrada Família Basilica in center background

## CHAPTER 2. SOUTH AFRICA

### Day 16 Johannesburg, South Africa – time zone (UTC+2)

(Shari) In Doha, Qatar—I never knew about this place until I realized we change planes here—I see many women dressed in burkas following behind their men and boy children, with girl children closely attached to their moms. As we ride an escalator to a lower floor a huge digital mural stretches in front of us. It shows people walking to and from in the desert with heat waves emanating up from the sand. Since it is 90° at midnight I think it apropos. Our two flights from Barcelona to Doha to Johannesburg take 17 hr. Luckily I sleep for about 4 hr. Qatar Airlines has more legroom, seats recline, and multiple meals keep us full with mediocre food. I do like the free on demand recent movies. “Manchester by the Sea” and “Fences” are my favorites.

(Bert) Shari has the window seat from Barcelona to Doha. After we cross the Mediterranean Sea diagonally, she tells me she sees city lights. I deduce she is watching Cairo, Egypt. I start watching the screen mounted in front of each seat and can see the flight path across the Red Sea and then the Arabian Peninsula—across Saudi Arabia—and then toward Doha, Qatar, on the coast of the Persian Gulf. I love geography and I find it incredible that I am flying over this area. Of course, it is evening and I see nothing of the terrain. We are flying southeast and cross into the next time zone before we land at Doha, a modern city and airport in Qatar. I have been carefully listening to the flight attendants on the pronunciation of the country. It is “Kaa’ tar”, with accent on the first syllable and the trailing ‘r’ sometimes swallowed.



Monitor screen in front of our seats. Find Cairo on left and Doha in center.

My viewpoint changes when I take the window seat from Doha to Johannesburg. I’ve got my camera out and continuously shoot out the window and then at the monitor in front of me. The



city lights of Doha are patterns of orange pinpoints outlining gentle curves of expressways, past the white street lights beside homes. In other shots I can see the vivid outlines of very tall skyscrapers.



Skyscrapers of Doha, Qatar



Doha city lights along coast of Persian Gulf at 2:54 AM local time

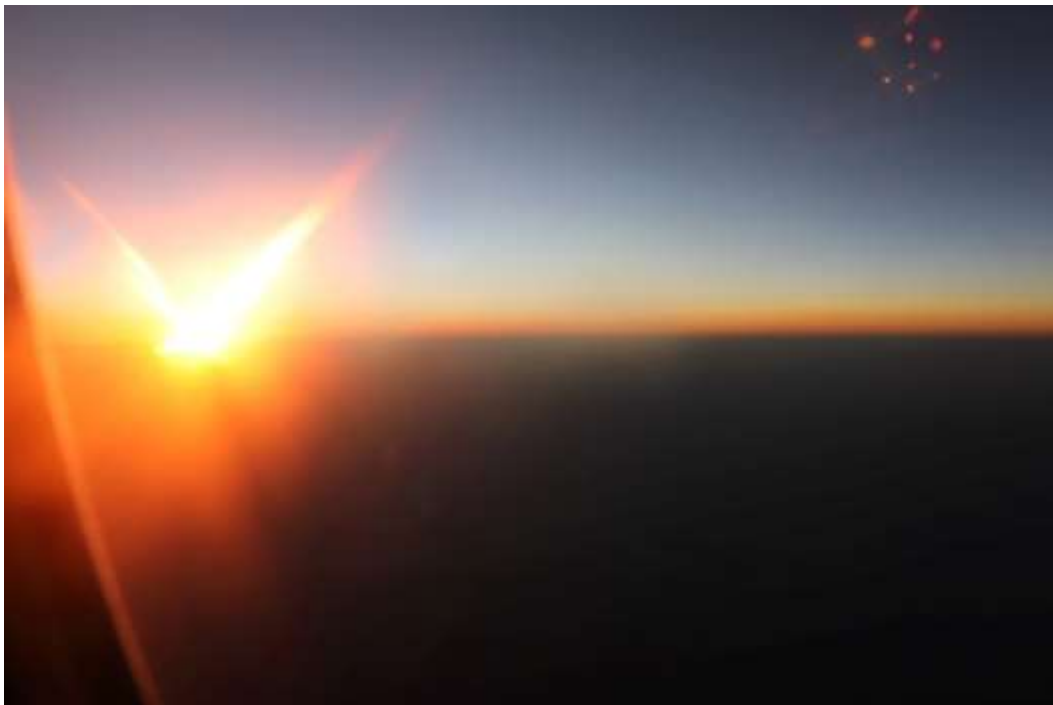


Doha city lights stretch for miles and after that the desert is pitch black

Most spectacular is the crimson first light highlighting the Persian Gulf while we fly at 34,000 ft. First light is at 3:36 AM and the sun shatters the horizon at 4:21 AM. We are now heading southwest, so we cross back into the Barcelona time zone. No need to change our clocks. According to the flight monitor we are flying over Lake Tanganyika and Lake Malawi, names I remember from when I used to have a large aquarium tank filled with African cichlids endemic to those lakes. I can possibly see the lakes from the air, but cloud cover obscures most of the earth's surface.



First light is at 3:36 AM over Persian Gulf



Sunrise over Persian Gulf at 4:21 AM

While monitoring our position, I have also been watching movies. I'm not much of a movie critic, but enjoyed Passengers, thought Assassin's Creed was stupid and confusing, liked Hacksaw Ridge, and very much liked Collateral Beauty. Imagine a pair of flights long enough

to watch four movies, eat several meals, charter our course, read a book for a half-hour, and catch three hours of sleep.



Shortly before arrival at Johannesburg



Outskirts of Johannesburg from the air

## Day 17 Johannesburg

(Shari) It is cold here in Johannesburg. Who would have thought? My sweater feels good in this 56° temperature. After passing customs, we meet the group and we head to the Vodacom shop to get local phones, the ATM place to get local currency, and the car rental place to rent a car for two days. The airport has these luggage carts that are capable of going up and down the escalators. Now that is scary to take your luggage I was sure the whole thing would careen downwards with a pile of suitcases spilling their guts on the moving steps.

By luck of the draw we get a new agent at Avis rental and for the next hour we go through the hoops to get our keys for the rental car. Now comes the real challenge: driving on the left side of the highway. Using the free app Maps.me I navigate us to the hotel and remind Bert to stay on the left. We of course miss a turn and have to “recalculate”. Stress! My phone is running out of battery power so I try to memorize the map as I holler at Bert as he makes a right hand turn on red into in coming traffic. Can't do that on left side driving! Luckily it is Sunday and traffic is light. I am thankful to reach the hotel and pleasantly surprised at its beauty and the readiness of our room hours before published check-in time. Unfortunately our key card does not work so after an hour we get a different room which is next to a dog kennel. You guessed it. Bark, bark, bark, ALL the time.

We take a nap before meeting the group and leave in Bobby's rental 10-passenger van for dinner. My first meal in Africa is steak at a restaurant with an American Indian motif.



Arrival at Johannesburg airport, South Africa



Beautiful grounds at hotel and conference center where we will spend next three nights

(Bert) I'm sure Shari will give you the logistics of reaching our hotel. The first thing I notice is the nicely wooded conference center grounds supports lots of birds. I walk around the area, peering with binoculars, snapping photos constantly. It has been several years since I have birded anywhere where there are birds I have not seen before. Now I am seeing new birds faster than my mind can compute. I'll settle with taking fast notes and many photos and sort out the identification later when I can reference my South Africa bird guide book. Later when I tally my list of those seen in one hour or so, I've seen one bird (House Sparrow) I could have seen in the U.S., one (Myna) that I saw often in Australia, and ten species that are life birds, although one of those I've photographed but as yet have not identified. Here are the new ones: Blacksmith Lapwing, Cape Wagtail, Hadedda Ibis, Kurricane Thrush, Speckled Pigeon, Cape Sparrow, Laughing Dove, Little Swift, and Speckled Mousebird.



Hadeda Ibis – incredibly loud, easily frightened and flying to the roof tops



Speckled Pigeon (note wings), but red eye patch is the key



Blacksmith Lapwing calls frequently from rooftops



Cape Sparrow, a very common bird that at first looks like a House Sparrow





Laughing Dove looks somewhat like our Mourning Dove



Cape Wagtail, almost always found here on the grass. Constantly wags its tail.



Speckled Mousebird – look at that tail length!

## Day 18 Johannesburg

(Shari) Our first African outing as a group is interesting. Bert's brother Byron and wife Janet drive with us to our tour destination of Cullinan. Here is a large diamond mine and a small tourist town. We get a tour of the surface of the mine which I am sure Bert will tell in detail.

(Bert) During the tour I write down lots of facts about the mine, but the most lasting impression is of the Cullinan Diamond. Formed under intense pressure and temperature 150 km below the surface, thrown up by an ancient volcano in a vertical shaft of kimberlite, and found just 9 m below today's surface, the Cullinan Diamond weighed 3106 carats (about 22 ounces). Linda models a plastic replica of the huge stone, balancing it on her ring finger. The original raw diamond was cut into two large gem diamonds and a handful of small diamonds. Cullinan I, called "Great Star of Africa" is a pear shaped 530 carat diamond now set into the Imperial Sceptre of Great Britain. Cullinan II is 317 carats with 64 facets and is set into the brow of the British Imperial State Crown. King Edward VII called the Cullinan II, III, and IV the "Lesser Stars of Africa."



Model of the 3106 carat Cullinan Diamond



Edge of the pit mine. Note the lighter area left of center, the location of the Cullinan Diamond



Close-up of the lighter area. The white section is where the Cullinan diamond was found.

(Shari) In Africa now for a full day and have not eaten traditional African food if there is such a thing. For lunch we go to a recommended Greek restaurant and share a meze plate for four with Byron and Janet. It is very good and many photos are taken of it.

(Bert) While on the mining tour my attention was drawn to a bee-eater which the guide says is a European Bee Eater. After lunch I go back to that area with my long lens camera and get several photos. The beautiful bird is actually a White-fronted Bee Eater. Also an eye-catcher is the White-bellied Sunbird I find probing flowers behind the restaurant. The Black-collared Barbet is hiding in deep shade near the parking lot and I have trouble getting enough camera light to bring out its brilliant red coloring.



White-fronted Bee Eater



White-bellied Sunbird



Black-collared Barbet

(Shari) The drive through the countryside is uneventful. Bert handles the car great and pretty soon I can stop reminding him of left lane driving. We see three women carrying something on their heads and some wildebeests behind a fence. Where is the camera when needed? The scenery is agricultural but since this is mid fall here nothing is really growing. The terrain is flat and the road does not go through any towns for the 40 mi. we drive. Not interested in food for dinner, I chat with the group in the hotel bar, sipping wine. We meet another couple and listen to their tales of their 30-hr. travel day to get here. Small world as she taught school in the same school district in Illinois during the same years as I did. Plus she and her husband often ate at our Friday night date night restaurant.

## **Day 19 Malonjeni Guest Farm**

(Shari) Very excited for the day to begin, I awake before my 6 AM alarm. Today we pick up our RV's, grocery shop, and drive to a game farm for a tour around the camp. How fun! I am extremely impressed with the organization of the RV dealership. When our bus load arrives, all our RV's are ready for us and the staff has cookies and drinks under a tent set up for our orientation. The owner takes us around an RV explaining the outside workings. We are dismissed to our individual RVs (each having one of us named in the windshield). Six at a time, paper work is completed, inside workings explained, inventory checked, and our bags unpacked.



RVs lined up ready for us to load our luggage



Orientation on how to handle our RVs



Shari at our RV with our luggage in the foreground



Back section of RV, showing picture window, table that makes into a bed, A/C, cabinets, and part of the kitchen area

We each take a drive around the parking lot before heading to the grocery store two blocks away. By noon our RV's are stocked with provisions and we eat lunch and head out. It takes about an hour to get out of the city which is a bit hairy especially when we get stuck in a right turn only



lane and want to go straight. No worries just a little scenic diversion around a prison and we are back on track. We arrive at the game farm with an hour to spare before our hayride-like ride around the acreage. Bert and I put company stickers, each with an identification number, on the back window of each rig. On our 2-hr. ride we see zebra, black wildebeests with white tails, and more varieties of “boks” than you can shake a stick at. I don’t know the names yet, but it sounds like Gem bock, bless bock, a bock that starts with a k and Elam. All have fancy racks with two prongs. After the ride we have our travel meeting and Marsha has a special drink for us that tastes better than Baileys Irish Cream. Such a great day!

(Bert) The highlight of the day for me came late in the afternoon when the sun was low on the horizon casting a red glow and dark shadows on the veldt. The lighting conditions make photography difficult, as does shooting from a bouncing wagon pulled by a tractor over rough ground. Although many of the herds of wild animals were distant to the eye, my long lens brings them closer. Here are the best I could get today.



Red Hartebeest



Mixed herds scattered across the veldt



Springbok and Cattle Egret



Impala



Zebra



Blesbok



Gemsbok



Crowned Lapwing



Eland



Spotted Thick-Knee



Buffalo

## Day 20 Golden Gate National Park

(Bert) Anxious to explore the campground area in pre-dawn light, I am outside at 6:10 AM. My first bird photo is silhouettes only. The small flock squawks boisterously whenever I attempt to get near them and immediately fly to another high perch. I saw these briefly yesterday and noted they long curved bills, strikingly red, and their attractive blue-green feathers and kite-string tails. It takes me a long time to find the species in my bird field guide because I do not recognize the bird family and the index picture at the front of the book has the wrong assigned page number.



Green (Red-billed) Wood-Hoopoe at 6:19 AM

Since I haven't been to Africa before, I recognize almost none of the birds. I finally have made the connection between the grassy ball nests hanging from many trees and the small yellow bird with the red eye that weaves the nests.



Cape Weaver



Weaver nests

The breeding season is complete for most birds, so it is a bit surprising to see a coot still tending chicks.





Red-knobbed Coot

We leave camp and drive to Golden Gate National Park, the gateway to the mountains. I more often envision Africa as flat plains, so it is with surprise that we drive through rugged mountains with picturesque cliffs catching contrasting light patterns. We stop for lunch in a quaint village called Clarens. Afterward, while Shari shops, I walk a few wooded side streets and to my complete surprise I find a bird I've always wanted to see. Long ago, the first James Michener book I read was *The Source* and in his book he writes about the hoopoe, a strange bird that probes the ground for prey. Oddly shaped, it sports a long curved bill partially balanced by headdress feathers protruding from the back of its head. In flight it displays a zebra pattern stretching across its wings. The hoopoe is in short grass in too bright light for a good photo, but I definitely want to document this sighting.



African Hoopoe



Fall colors in Clarens

(Shari) Sometimes it is difficult to think I am in South Africa. Today's ride takes us through scenery reminiscent of Utah, houses similar to the U.S., and we even eat pizza for lunch. But then I'll see a zebra in a field with cows and horses or black women in colorful skirts and tunics, carrying things on their head and then I realize where I am. Tonight we are camped in a national

park and instead of seeing bears and moose as in Alaska we see zebras and wildebeests. Supposedly baboons are here too but I have not seen any yet. After our travel meeting many of us walk to an overlook to watch the cliff formations change color with the sunset. Off in a distance we can hear an African choir which adds a serendipitous slant to an already interesting day.



Long vistas at Golden Gate National Park



Zebras at Golden Gate National Park



Cliffs seen from our campsite



Sunset sets cliffs on fire at Golden Gate National Park

## **Day 21 Midmar Dam**

(Bert) Since I am rested and can't sleep another wink, I get up an hour and a half before first light and edit yesterday's photos. At 6 AM I get out to explore the campground hoping to find

the baboons that they say visit early in the morning. At the wooden foot bridge over the creek I scare up a bird in the darkness of overshadowing trees. With my each advancement the little bird hops another stone step up the creek bank, but I finally get a photo by overexposing the lens. Later, farther up the hillside, I see the bird perched on atop a tree and record it singing a strange song. The song puzzles me and only on my return downhill to a recognize I was watching the little bird but below it on the same tree was a dove that was doing the singing.





Red-eyed Dove



Red-winged Starling

At the foot bridge I see a baboon rummaging through a campsite. Finding nothing to eat, it moves on to the next site while all campers are fast asleep, unaware of the intruder. I try for photos, but the baboon is wary and keeps its distant. Later Shari is up and about and wants to see a baboon. This one is gone and we find no others, so Shari returns to the caravan. I cross the

highway to explore further and then seem movement on the distant mountainside. A troop of baboons are crossing the steep vertical rocks, clinging to handholds and footholds. Once across this section they come to a small dam with a shallow stream of water trickling over its expanse. They approach slowly to one side and then scamper quickly to the other side as if trying to keep their feet from getting wet. Although quite distant from my viewpoint, I take lots of photos and some entertaining videos.



Baboon in campsite



Baboons scampering across rocky mountainside



Baboons crossing dam

We continue our travels by RV through Golden Gate National Park, admiring the stunning landscape, and arrive at the Basotho Cultural Village. Here a guide leads us through the recreated village, starting with house styles of the 1700s and continuing to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.



The change in styles shows the influence of Dutch and English immigration, most notably in the addition of windows and an acceptance of profile shapes other than domes.



Golden Gate National Park



Oldest style Basotho huts



Basotho houses after influence of immigrants



Basotho houses of early 20<sup>th</sup> century

(Shari) We stop at a rest area on a toll road (they call them Ultra City) for lunch at a chain called Mug and Bean. Again this place is terrific and it is hard to decide what to eat. Lots of things are served in mugs. Byron starts out with a Sundae mug and moves on to the main course. Some choose salad mugs. Bert and I settle on sharing a Mexican plate. They do Mexican pretty good

except they added chicken wings. Good, but not what I think of as Mexican. Many also take slices of cake back for a later snack.



Lunch stop

(Bert) Our drive continues throughout the afternoon and we reach Midmar Dam just after 5 PM gate closing. Bobby and Marsha reach someone on the phone and they open the gate so we can get to campsites overlooking the lake at sunset.

## **Day 22 Shakaland**

(Bert) If birding in Texas near water, I am accustomed to seeing many ducks. Not so thus far in South Africa. I'm at the lake shoreline at dawn just as the sky evolves to a pink blush and gray fluffs of clouds obscure the opposite shore, providing a backdrop to sailboats anchored in the bay. My first ducks of South Africa fly in pairs high above the lake, still gloomily dark from a shortage of morning light, but enough contrast to make them out as Spur-winged Geese. Later, in better light, I find three Egyptian Geese waddling on shore at the yacht club.



Spur-winged Geese flying over Midmar in early light at 6:20 AM



Egyptian Goose at Midmar Dam



Boubou

Bob and Marcia asked us to check out an alternative campsite that includes a wildlife drive, so we head out of Midmar ahead of the others. Drought has reduced the water level at Msinsi Albert Falls to 36% of normal, revealing islands not normally seen. On our drive to the campsites we pass zebras lounging on the short grass of the picnic areas and impalas nibbling nearby. Two young male impalas are sparring. I'm told that after many dueling matches with all eligible bachelors, the winner will challenge the current leader for his harem of females. After a 7 km wildlife drive through a small portion of the reserve we reach the lakeside campground and check out the facilities for future reference. At a volleyball court a male Ostrich is joined by six females pecking at the stubby grass. I drive faster on the road back to the entrance, but abruptly stop to watch a group of vervet monkeys scamper through the trees.



Zebra at picnic grounds of Albert Falls



Sparring impalas at Albert Falls



Blesbok mostly hidden in tall grass



Common Ostrich



Vervet Monkey

(Shari) Since seeing the movie Shaka Zulu, I have been looking forward to our stay at Shakaland. We are to stay in traditional huts (of course, ours will have king size beds and indoor plumbing). The huts were built for the movie. In fact the whole village was built for the movie. Since then a hotel chain bought them and converted the area to a hotel and conference center. We arrive late because we are checking out another camping possibility for future years. We are excited to see zebras at the campsite and those bok things. But the camping looks primitive to me even though it has electricity. We hurry to our rooms and rush to our cultural program that includes Zulu customs, combat fighting, education, marriage, and cultural dancing. Finally we eat traditional foods like maize pudding and stewed beef rice and chicken. Prime rib as well ... don't know how traditional that is, though.





A private hut for tonight looks traditional on the outside but is fully modern inside



Janet and Byron go native



Ron joins in the dancing

## **Day 23 St. Lucia**

(Bert) Our Shakaland guide demonstrates how to throw a spear and aims at a distant wall. He competes with another traditionally costumed warrior and both secure the points of their spears in the wooded wall. Now it is the turn of our men. One by one, Juergen, Jim, Ron, Brent, Byron, all try their best and can only throw the spear half the distance. My turn now, I'm sure I can do better, but it also falls only half the distance and unceremoniously plops to the ground in a crash.



Demonstrating spear throwing



Great technique!



A mighty throw, but the spear falls short of the target by half the distance

(Shari) Breakfast is served in the beautiful dining room overlooking the lake. Again this morning we are given a cultural program about Zulu courtship and making and throwing spears. We say goodbye to our wonderful guide and head for the Indian Ocean. We have to be there by 3 PM for our boat tour on the estuary. Immediately after departing the dock we see a pod of hippopotamuses. For the next two hours we see lots and lots of hippos, a rhinoceros and those bok antelopes.





(Bert) While the hippos are quite the show, we also see an African crocodile, a waterbuck, several buffalo, and a variety of birds, best of which is the African Fish Eagles. The eagles are remarkably close, with not interest in taking flight.



African Fish Eagle



Waterbuck



Buffalo

(Shari) Dinner is at a ski & boat club overlooking the estuary. We still need to move our rig when we get back because the electricity didn't work at the site we first selected. Plus the dash A/C also does not work. What a pain, especially in the dark!

## **Day 24 Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park**

(Bert) I wish I had worn an extra jacket to insulate me from the cold morning air as we wiz along the highway in an open-air Land Rover from our campground on the Indian Ocean to an inland preserve. The vehicle is designed with four levels in a staircase of seats, each a foot higher than the level immediately in front of it. Without a roof or side windows, we have a clear view in three directions. But the design also leaves us exposed to the wind and elements.

The Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park is the oldest wildlife reserve in South Africa. In fact, it was first set aside by King Shaka as a private Zulu game reserve. Without its conservation efforts, the rhinoceros could have gone extinct.

(Shari) 4:45 am comes awfully early. We are to meet the safari truck at the gate at 6. After an hour's ride we start our first game drive. Our guide/driver folds down the windshield so we have a clear view in all directions. The first animals we spot are buffalo peacefully eating grass in the far distance. This preserve has all the Big 5 game animals and the buffalo is the first to check off the list. By the end of the day we saw all but the lion.





Herd of buffalo covers the hillside

(Bert) The vastness of the park is expressed when we spot our first giraffes. In my photo, even though taken with my 400mm lens, the giraffes are mere pinpricks and only after substantial enlargement can you see the long-necked long-necked creatures. With few exceptions, all of the animals and birds are at great distance from our confined perch in the safari vehicle. While it gives us an appreciation of their spacious habitat, it does little for getting good photos or good close-up views.



Two giraffes are standing a bit right of center in this photo



Giraffes at Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park



Rhinoceros, another of the Big 5



Impala



This giraffe is closer to our vehicle

I ask the driver to stop when I see a small bird with a long tail flying straight as an arrow. It alights on an upper branch and our guide tells us it is a Pin-tailed Whydah. On the paved road we see fresh evidence that elephants are present.



Arrow flight of Pin-tailed Whydah and at rest with its split tail feathers



Elephants must be nearby

(Shari) We had really good looks at two elephants play-fighting by pushing each other in the head. Another time a zebra stands in the road and will not let us pass him for quite some time.



Zebra stubbornly blocks the road



Young elephants practice battling

(Bert) We stop at a picnic area and I investigate the surrounds at least up to the warning signs advising me not to walk farther. In dense forest I find a Nyala. Later we find a small group of them well camouflaged in a copse of tall bushes. Our guide tells us Nyala are not fast runners so they avoid becoming prey by browsing in thickets to dense for lions to penetrate.



Typical obscured view of a female Nyala



Male Nyala

(Shari) After a very hearty lunch of strange sandwiches it starts to rain. We were given waterproof ponchos and that makes the ride back more comfortable. Unfortunately, perhaps because of the rainstorm, when we get back to the rig the electricity is out on our corner of the campground and we have to move again. Bert is out in the rain getting wet as he moves the RV several times to find a working electrical pole. We get moved just before it really starts to pour. The monkeys don't mind the rain though as they scamper in and around our camper for hours. At 5:15 we walk to the ski & boat club for another delicious dinner.



Vervet Monkeys find a morsel of food at the campground



It's nice to share



## Day 25 Nsoko, Swaziland

(Bert) Our campsite is about a mile from the Indian Ocean, first to the campground entrance and then along an estuary boardwalk through a mangrove swamp, followed by a very long stretch of soft sand. My first new life bird of the day is a Woolly-necked Stork strutting across the parking lot before sunrise, soon followed by a Saddle-billed Stork in the marsh.



Woolly-necked Stork at St. Lucia



Saddle-billed Stork

Just before the start of the sandy beach a troop of vervet monkeys scamper in and around a copse of eucalyptus trees. I can see the Indian Ocean now and recall when I first saw the ocean from the other shore at Perth, Australia. I test the water with my hand and find it warm. No time for swimming now. Swallows swoop overhead, too fast to photograph. But one stops to land on a upright stick and to my surprise I see it is a Blue-cheeked Bee-eater that seems much out of habitat.



Vervet Monkey



Indian Ocean at St. Lucia



Blue-cheeked Bee-eater at the Indian Ocean beach

(Shari) Did you ever see a dung beetle? Bert pointed out this rolling round ball on the gravel path. Upon looking closer it was a black beetle pushing a ball of dung, sometimes climbing atop. We stop for lunch at the self-drive Phongolo Nature Reserve and park near the lake. Using the electricity of the run down campground we charge our batteries and nuke our chicken with the microwave. Bert ambles around and spots rhinos across the lake and hippos near shore. We see lots of impala too. It is a nice lunch stop but too primitive for me. I would not even use their toilets preferring the clean one in my rig.



Dung beetle

(Bert) After our lunch stop we continue to drive around the nature reserve, finding more animals and birds, notably a family of warthogs and at the exit gate a very colorful agama. We cross the border into the Kingdom of Swaziland and the contrast in poverty is noticeable. We continue through countryside dotted with ramshackle houses until we reach our campground, an oasis in dry brushlands and close enough to wildlife that a group of giraffes wander into view. In the evening we are entertained by local dancers, a family group that Bobby and Marsha arranged for the performance.



Warthog



Black-necked agama or Southern Tree Agama (*Acanthocercus atricollis*)

(Shari) We get to camp by 3 PM and I have time to shower and put on clean clothes. Boy, does that feel good. I ask for a laundry but find none. We are desperate. I'll have to hand wash tomorrow if we don't find one. Good thing I had some wash done on the ship coming over here.

After our travel meeting we are entertained by native dancing. A very attractive woman wearing a striking costume and a T-shirt that says "You don't own me" dances her heart out. She is accompanied by her family. Mom, brothers, nieces, nephews, all dressed in colorful clothing. Dinner is served buffet style and includes the traditional cake with pudding sauce. This cake was tastier than the other two I had.



Campground in Swaziland

## Day 26 Kruger National Park

(Bert) Before leaving Swaziland I walk around the campground. Birds often alight in trees resplendent in long narrow sharp thorns. It's a wonder they don't get pricked. I'm fascinated by the trees that have flattened umbrella crowns supported by a core of spokes and an absence of side lower branches. It is the typical image of Africa, although I only see these trees in certain lowland flattened areas.



Canary amidst thorns



probably female Yellow-fronted Canary





(Shari) Traveling through Africa is so much like traveling through Mexico. We can't help but make comparisons Sugar cane fields, trucks, and processing plants. Bananas and pineapple fields. Topes, but here they are called humps. Cattle prodded across roads and down dirt paths by black faces instead of brown. Goats running wild on the highways. Wash hanging on bushes to dry. Neat and clean children in uniforms going to school, many waving at us as we pass by, especially here in Swaziland.

(Bert) We continue driving through Swaziland with little of note until we reach the border and with minimal effort we exit, go through customs, and reenter South Africa. These border crossings are so easy compared to our 6-10 hr. crossings when we traveled through Central America.



Traveling through Kingdom of Swaziland



Leaving Kingdom of Swaziland, entering South Africa

From the border it is only a short drive to Malelane Gate of Kruger National Park, one of the most famous parks in Africa. It was designated a park in 1898, expanded and changed names a couple of times, and in 1959 the entire park boundary was fenced, encompassing an area of over 2 million hectares (almost 5 million acres). Tourist cars were first allowed to enter the park in 1927 and nowadays a web of both paved and gravel roads lattice the park. Severe restrictions apply, including a 50 kph speed limit, never exiting the vehicle except at restaurant/campground fenced sites, and not driving off-road. The reason for confinement to a vehicle soon becomes obvious when we start seeing wildlife. Only moments after crossing the gate we see a herd of impalas, just the first of many and undoubtedly the most abundant large animal at Kruger. Within the next hour or so as we drive to tonight's campground we see wildebeests, elephants, and rhinoceros.



Eye to eye with an impala



Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill



Wildebeest



White Rhinoceros



Elephant eating low branches

## **Day 27 Kruger National Park**

(Shari) The crack of dawn comes too soon. Bert has been up since 3 AM. Like a little kid he is anxious to get out and start looking at the new things in nature. I, of course, can wait until later.

Alas, I get up at 5 to be ready to leave at 6. Off we go on our self-drive through the park. We see lots of birds in the early morning and the click of Bert's camera is constant. As the morning progresses we start seeing what I came here for: elephants. It takes us 3 hr. to reach another campground. Here we look it over for future reference and then eat lunch on the open air patio of the Mug & Bean where I enjoy a cappuccino while watching hippos across the river.

(Bert) As Bobby says, the large animals can be seen anytime of the day, but I know from experience the best time to find birds is early morning, so today we are out in our RV driving the Kruger roads shortly after the gates open at 6 AM.



Marabou Stork



Greater Blue-eared Starling



Probably Brown Snake-Eagle



Driving the roads of Kruger National Park with animals crossing the road in front of us: impala, baboon, hippopotamus



Baboon





Laughing Dove



Kudu

(Shari) It is 2 PM and we had better hurry back as we have to get out of the Kruger gate before they lock it. First we have a good look at some giraffes eating tree leaves and baboons playing in and around the road. Tonight we park our RVs and stay in a fancy hotel with a great walk-in

shower. The grounds are open air and we eat a wonderful buffet dinner in the Boma, a circular area with a fire pit. After such an early morning start we all are ready for bed.



Cape Vulture



Baboons back up traffic



Southern White-crowned Shrike



Vervet Monkey



Wild Dogs at rest

## Day 28 Sabi Sabi

(Shari) Oh my gosh! I thought last night's hotel was fancy. This resort is over the top gorgeous. Our rooms are not ready yet when we arrive, so we relax, have a refreshing drink of fruited sparkling water and are greeted by the resort manager who gives us an outline of the procedures for the next 48 hr. Again we are in an open air lounge and dining area surrounded by smaller areas arranged with groupings of living room furniture amenable to conversations. Soon someone blows a horn, our clue for lunch. Lunch is gourmet. It's too much to eat when I am still full from the big breakfast provided at the hotel. I limit myself to salads of calamari, crocodile, and roasted vegetables. Then it is time to see our room. I should say suite because it has a sitting room, a bedroom and a huge bathroom with tub (candles, salts, and bath foam provided), an indoor glass shower AND outdoor shower. Patios adjoin the sitting area and the bedroom. I need a nap now so stretch out in the bigger than king size bed.

(Bert) Our safari vehicle edges off the rough dirt road and into the veldt. Our driver and guide Lazarus homes in on a kill site where a day earlier a lion killed a kudu. Mostly already devoured, the meaty carcass lies beside a lion. Lazarus inches the vehicle closer. The lion conscious of our presence, shows us no attention. Fat and lazy, the two lions sprawl in the golden grass like diners after turkey dinner at Thanksgiving. Lazily, they raise their heads, posing for more pictures. One yawns, exposing vicious canines. Being the birder in the group, I spy a vulture perched twenty feet above us in a nearby tree. While I take my photos, Lazarus tells me it is a Hooded Vulture. In another tree opposite the carcass awaits a White-backed Vulture. Patiently, they wait for their chance to close in on the kill, but when one poses a threat the male lion stands up at the carcass, signaling that the lions are not yet finished with dinner. Should a hyena approach, the lions would be more aggressive. In fact, the lions will guard the

carcass for several days, taking turns on leave, but always protecting the meal from scavengers until they have had their fill.



Safari vehicle







Hooded Vulture



White-backed Vulture



(Shari) Teatime is 3:30 when I get a cappuccino but pass on the huge assortment of desserts. We are then divided into groups of six for our game ride. Bert goes to the guides standing around and asks which ones are bird knowledgeable and all point to Lazarus. Lazarus it is. For the next 3 hr. we drive the private reserve and see animals so close that at times I am scared,



especially when we see the lions. They had made a kill yesterday and are guarding the meat from hyenas and vultures until they had their fill. I'll let Bert talk about the other things we saw.

(Bert) So much to see, so many stories to tell, I'll limit it to a few and let the photos do most of the talking. I'll start with the Black-shouldered Kite. The common name is confusing as in the U.S. we previously used that name and now call it a White-tailed Kite. In Australia, they use the Black-shouldered name as they do in at least one of two of my Africa books. But actually it is three different species that look the same to me, all in the genus *Elanus*. The goshawk was on a utility pole as we drove the washboard entrance road. I found the colorful sunbird and flycatcher in the wooded lawns surrounding the lodge.



Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*)



African Goshawk



Collared Sunbird



juvenile African Paradise Flycatcher

I learned that you can identify a white rhino from a black by its square jaw line.



White Rhinoceros

A bird we encounter frequently and often in small groups is the Go-away Bird. It derives its name from its call “go away” which it shouts from treetops, a warning call when threatened by a predator, in which case others join in the alarm.



Grey Go-away Bird



Giraffe basks in setting sun



Part of a harem of 40 impalas

(Shari) At dusk we stop for a snack. The sunset is gorgeous and watching it with a gin-and-tonic in my hand is surreal. When we get back the man blows the horn for dinner. Again gourmet with grilled ostrich or zebra are just two of my choices. The starter is little quiches and pumpkin soup. Dessert again has an array of choices. All the wine I can drink accompanies the meal. We are guided back to our room and the scented foamy bath feels so good before I conk out between the crispy white smooth sheets.





A moon sliver at sunset



Slice of the moon



Dinner illuminated by lanterns in an outside patio

## **Day 29 Sabi Sabi**

(Shari) I am up but not awake at the early morning 5:30 AM knock at our door. I sleepily lumber to the open air dining room for coffee and rolls. I notice the cappuccino machine is

operating so I ask to have a cup. Unfortunately, Lazarus and our group are ready to go. I gulp the coffee hurriedly and drag my feet to the safari truck. Juergen tries to get me to smile as he apparently is a morning person. It does not take me long to wake up as no sooner had we left the driveway and a leopard is spotted. We watch it slink down from its perch and walk across the road in front of us. Nothing like starting the day on a high note! I'll let Bert tell about the animal sights, but I will say they are fantastic. We get back to the lodge at 9 and are treated to a scrumptious breakfast. We can have just about anything we want including quail eggs: cute and lemony. But I am exhausted and sleep the rest of the morning until lunch. And then another game drive at 4 until 7. Tonight we have champagne in the jungle. Then it's back at camp for dinner and bed.



Leopard climbing down from its sleeping berth at 6:10 AM

(Bert) Did you know that safari vehicles can hunt in packs? They communicate between each other by a radio mounted on the dashboard, all vehicles on the same frequency. Without static, it is easy to hear the chatter but not understandable unless you are conversant in the Zulu dialect the guides speak. Drivers like Lazarus fan out across the myriad dirt roads that meander in a bewildering pattern, zipping through the flat areas, winding around trees, plunging down gullies, crossing dry stream beds, climbing formidable banks. Spotting the big animals—elephants, giraffes, buffalos, wildebeests—is very often a matter of luck. When one safari catches the scent it hones in on the target and signals the other vehicles. To get a closer look, Lazarus and the other drivers exit the dirt road and plunge into the brushland of waist high dry grass, hammering down dry 6-ft. trees and thorn covered bushes that crackle under the tires and scrape across the metal covered bottom of the truck. A spotter sits on an armless chair mounted on the front



bumper. From his high perch he scans for wildlife and when the vehicle tackles the bush, he hand signals the driver with left-right guidance to avoid the most formidable barriers. Together the team zeroes in on the prey. As we get closer, those of us in the three-tier seats raise our cameras to shoot the wild animals. Meanwhile, other safari vehicles arrive from the far reaches of the reserve, called in by the radios. They circle the prey so all participants can get close views, sometimes so close we must look down toward the tires to see the reclining leopard or lion. If the animal heads in another direction, the vehicles reconnoiter, form new circles that enclose their prey, sometimes heading in a straight line to outrun the animal and then turning to see it approach. The tactics keep the animal in view at very close range for 15-25 min.



A leopard is in the dry grass midway between the two vehicles



Close view of leopard eyeing the safari vehicle



In tall dry grass the leopard blends into his environment

(Bert) You might think that the tactics of the safari vehicles constitute harassment, but I see no evidence of that. The particular private reserve we are visiting has provided protection for wildlife for over 30 years and in the adjacent Kruger National Park for nearly a century. Thus the animals' memories of human hunting have disappeared in succeeding generations. While

well aware of the vehicles, the animals pay them no attention. The animals see the vehicle as a single unit with many arms and heads and lots of whispers, but neither harmful nor edible. Should any of us stand or reach excessively out of the vehicle the lion, leopard, or wild dog would be aroused, so we are admonished not to do so. Anyone ignorant enough to step out of the vehicle would instantly become prey to a meat-eating wild animal and we would witness a docile animal suddenly become a lightning-fast aggressor. Provided we follow the rules, the wild animals completely ignore us and go about their business of sleeping, hunting, eating, mating, and tending young. While they ignore us, we are exquisitely entertained to real life National Geographic moments only a few feet from our eyes and camera lens.



We watched this leopard hunting for 27 min.



Hamerkop



Huddled family of Hamerkops



Spotted hyena



Wildebeest



Wildebeest



African Green Pigeon



Wild Dog



Wild Dog



Cape White-eye

## **Day 30 Kruger National Park**

(Bert) The elephant parade starts at 6:42 AM. Apparently the announcement between elephants was made somewhat earlier, broadcast at low sub-human frequency in a blast that travels 4-5 mi. The first full-grown adult, leader of the pack, crosses our dirt road and is trailed, mostly single-file, by 40+ more adults and young. Our driver Lazarus parallels the herd cross-country so that we get a prolonged view of the migration. Although the elephants usually graze in small family groups, moving slowly through the bush, sometimes the command is given to relocate to another area, perhaps precipitated by a unwanted nearby predator. Family groups combine for the relocation, hustling at a trotting speed only a fast human runner could compete with, though probably not through the tall grass and littering branches traversed by the elephants.







This morning at Sabi Sabi and later at Kruger National Park is particularly good for bird sightings and photography. Here is a sampling.



Crested Barbet



Bennett's Woodpecker (female)



Striped Kingfisher



Magpie Shrikes



Lilac-breasted Roller

This last photo of the roller—and one of many I took in recent days—is very special to me. On the wall in my home office are two framed paintings of rollers. They once hung in the living room of my grandparents. After my grandmother's death my mother received the paintings and gave them to me. It's the only thing I have from my grandmother and I cherish it, always wanting to see the bird in the drawing. Now I have.



Burchell's Starling



Swainson's Spurfowl



Hinged Tortoise



Zebra collage



Red-billed Quelea or Village Indigobird ?



Cut-throat Finch (female)



Three-banded Plover



## Day 31 Kruger National Park

(Bert) I'll start my story slowly, covering early morning sightings, before building to the really exciting tales. Again, I am on the lookout for birds. Other observers focus on the large mammals and are often oblivious to the many beautiful birds also present. Here are a few of my early morning photos.



White-browed Robin-Chat



Tawny Eagle



As I study the giraffe, she studies me.

Through 10X binoculars, I've been studying distant soaring birds, dark silhouettes against a bright sky. In ghostly lighting and too far away they are difficult to identify except by shape. So, instead, I photograph the birds, blow up the tiny object to full screen, set the brightness, contrast and color to maximum, and get enough detail to identify the bird. The result is not a nice photo, but it does tell me what I have been observing.



Original photo using 400 mm lens. Note absence of detail.



Bateleur clearly identifiable after substantial photo-editing

We come across a herd of impalas and find one female that is being preened by oxpeckers. A half dozen canvas various parts of her body, gleaning insects from her hide. She ignores them, except when one cleans her ears. She flips her ear in irritation, but allows the oxpecker to continue its work.



Red-billed Oxpeckers sitting on rump of an impala



Red-billed Oxpecker checking out impala's ear



Grotesquely colorful head of Helmeted Guineafowl

(Shari) I thought going back to Kruger for another day would be a letdown after our private reserve. Boy was I wrong! Some of the group just hung around the hotel because at first Kruger was not letting any more people into the park due to overcrowding. It is some sort of holiday this weekend. Marcia, our leader, had been told we would not have any problem getting back in. But that was at a different gate. She went to talk to the folks in the office and we were allowed into the park. Byron and Janet are with us and we take a road not yet traveled. Bert and I think we are going to different places and when everyone realizes Bert's route will take us out of the park, we balk. So we stay inside the boundaries and see tons of elephants. Literally!

(Bert) I had been teasing Lazarus about finding a cheetah, fully knowing they are scarce, secretive, and wander wide territories. Marcia, who has made six trips to South Africa, has not seen one as yet. We've been driving a minor road through Kruger and reach the Phabeni Gate. I talk to a border guard about our options and he mentions two places where there have been recent cheetah sightings. We choose the closer location although we had already driven a mile or so of the dirt road and found it corrugated with painful washboard. Not timid about driving bad roads, Shari and I decide to pursue the course.

(Shari) We eat our lunch at a picnic site and then Byron and Janet do not want to drive the bumpy gravel road so they go off on their own. To us the road is not all that bad as we are used to gravel roads. Hardly anyone else is on the road but the few cars that come toward us tell us to watch out for the cheetah. I wish they'd give us better directions like how far, what side of road, etc. I do not have to worry as when we go around the bend we see three or four of cars parked. They are all looking at the cheetahs that are just lying around and resting. Really cool!

(Bert) Seeing the two cheetahs lazily lounging in a small clearing between head-high brambly brushlands, is the highlight of our South Africa trip. I position my long lens out of my window, aiming between bushes, nudging the RV forward for alternate positions. The cheetahs pay us no attention, alternating between fully stretched out sublime positions and raising their heads just enough to periscope their surroundings. Their lazy attitudes belie their dexterity and extreme capacity for speed. The cheetahs suggest speediness just by their long lean greyhound like bodies. Even their petite heads suggest minimizing weight for the run. Like the other animals, especially lions and leopards, their spotted fur blends into the environment like dabbled light. Mesmerized by the scene, we linger for a half hour, leisurely studying the cheetah pair.



Two relaxing cheetahs

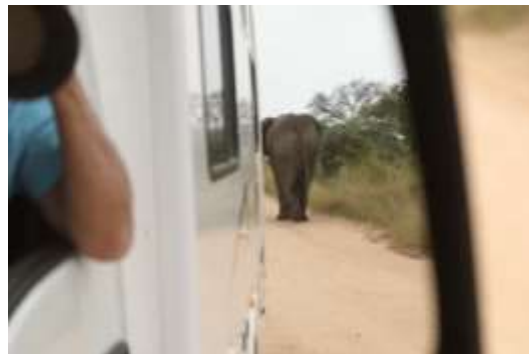




(Bert) Upon meeting an oncoming car, I talk to the driver about possible sightings ahead. She informs me a rogue elephant has commandeered the road and is blocking traffic. She had made a U-turn to avoid the conflict. We proceed ahead to check it out.

When we reach the scene, much of the traffic must have bypassed the huge elephant, but one car remains jackknifed between us and the pachyderm to get an angled view of the nearby beast. The elephant approaches the vehicle, nearing its back bumper. Alarmed, the driver straightens the car and heads in our direction. The elephant follows. With nowhere to go, I keep our camper in position and the elephant passes within an arm's reach of my side of the RV. I snap a quick two photos of my rearview mirror just after it passes.





(Shari) After we have our fill of looks and pictures we head back to the campground. It has started to rain but finishes just in time for our travel meeting. I attend the meeting and Bert does the laundry. Such a deal! We had better do our wash as I fear this may be our last chance of the trip. For dinner we finish up some food in the refrigerator and then take a walk to the gift store. Bert and I both get a shirt. Byron and Janet are debating about shipping a leopard—too big for

suitcases—home to go with the giraffe they already have in their sunroom. It would look really cool.

## Day 32 Kruger National Park and Middelburg

(Bert) Yesterday I counted animals. In a day in the Lower 48, we usually don't see much besides a handful of deer and a few flattened roadkill. In Alaska, we are excited to encounter moose, black bears, grizzlies, and an assortment of snowshoe hares and Arctic ground squirrels, though rarely in large numbers. Yesterday in Kruger National Park I counted 48 elephants, 7 groups of impala numbering 1-40 in size, 9 kudu, 16 hippopotamuses, 6 zebras, 7 warthogs, 2 cheetahs, 2 lions, 5 giraffes, and several troops of baboons.

At 6 AM this morning, just outside our camping spot, I photograph Hadedra Ibises roosting on a leafless tree. These ibises are not aquatic species like all the other ibis I know. Here, the drab ibises blend with the debarked branches like dried cones on a dead tree. If aroused, the ibises trumpet raucous calls louder than disturbed roosters announcing dawn. From the *ha-aa* calls, the ibis derives its name. Later, I add a colorful pigeon resembling a parrot to my photo collection.



Tree full of Hadedra Ibis



African Green Pigeon

We head out of Kruger this morning, not a great distance, although I expect it will take a few hours because we may be slowed by encountering wild animals again. We are barely out of the campground perimeter fence when we see two lions catnapping on the road. These two lions, a male and his mate, have been lying near the same spot of asphalt for the past three days now. Perhaps the warm flat pavement is the attraction, but for the dozens of passing vehicles they are the rubbernecked show.



Road jam caused by two lounging lions



The lions own the road. Gawkers from vehicles are like harmless passing birds.



King of the Road

We confront another blockage, this one heading in oncoming traffic. A pack of wild dogs trots on the road, followed by a string of vehicles. Perhaps the wild dogs also find the paved road easier transit than the rough thorny shrubs and tall grass of the bush. The wild dogs show a strong resemblance to German shepherds, though mangier and more spotted.



Wild Dogs



Wild Dog



A giraffe crosses the highway after a car passes.



Crocodiles lounge on riverbanks below the last bridge out of Kruger

(Shari) We depart Kruger in our regular spot, i.e., last in line. We are acting tailgunners but do not have a whole lot of tasks to do. I try to watch for items left behind and stray guests who may not know where to turn. Only a couple of times do we get so separated and I speak on the radio to tell people when our turn is coming or to tell Bobby when we all have gotten on a particular highway. Our stop for the night is in a rural area and is located on a lake. It looks pretty snazzy for a South African campground but like other campgrounds (except Kruger) we are the only ones in it. Before our dinner tonight, we have a game drive. It reminds me of a kiddie hayride and after seeing the real animals in the wild, it is a bit tame. Our first stop is to see three penned up lions. Their expression looks sad although they obviously are well cared for. We drive around the property in a wagon pulled by a tractor and see zebras in the field as well as another one of those bok antelope.

(Bert) In mid-afternoon we arrive at our last campsite for South Africa. Tomorrow we will drive for a few hours and return our RVs. The campground is on a small lake and I have a few minutes to photograph birds before we will have a wagon ride around the game farm. My sightings include a Yellow-billed Duck, the only wild duck I recall seeing in Africa. On our wagon ride we see caged lions and fenced antelopes, something that does not appeal to me after seeing so much in the wild. One of the gazelles is the gemsbok, also called Oryx, which we have now seen at two game farms, but not in the wild because it resides in an arid area which we have not visited. Sporting its outlandish saber horns, the Oryx is the symbol for Qatar Airlines which flew us to South Africa.



African Pied Wagtail



Yellow-billed Duck





Gemsbok (*Oryx gazelle*)

(Shari) After our ride, we only have a few minutes to get to the restaurant. Our meal is terrific and the T-bone steak I ordered is cooked perfectly and tastily seasoned. The restaurant has given me a screen to use and with my projector I show the movie I made of the trip. As I watch it, I get a warm and fuzzy feeling as I relive the events of the journey. I hope others do too.



Farewell Dinner



## Day 33 Johannesburg

(Bert) Melding from pastel pink to golden glow, sunrise reflects across the lake, backlighting reverse silhouettes of dark shoreline trees.





(Bert) A Blacksmith Lapwing alights from the grassy shore and my photo catches its blurred downstroke wing action. I only have a few minutes before our caravan takes an early morning leave, so I quickly walk around the campground and beyond. I notice weaver nests in the trees and, surprisingly, a bird exiting from one though the breeding season is over. Most of the nests I've seen so far were built by Yellow Weavers, but this bird is different, looking very sparrow-like. In fact, when I look it up in my book it is aptly named White-browed Sparrow-weaver.



Blacksmith Lapwing



Nest of White-browed Sparrow-weaver



White-browed Sparrow-weaver

(Shari) We depart early today as it is our last day of this segment of tours and we are to return the RV's. We pack up all our things and put our leftover food in bags for Marcia to give to a lady who takes it to a local church. A bus picks us up and takes us to the Nelson Mandela

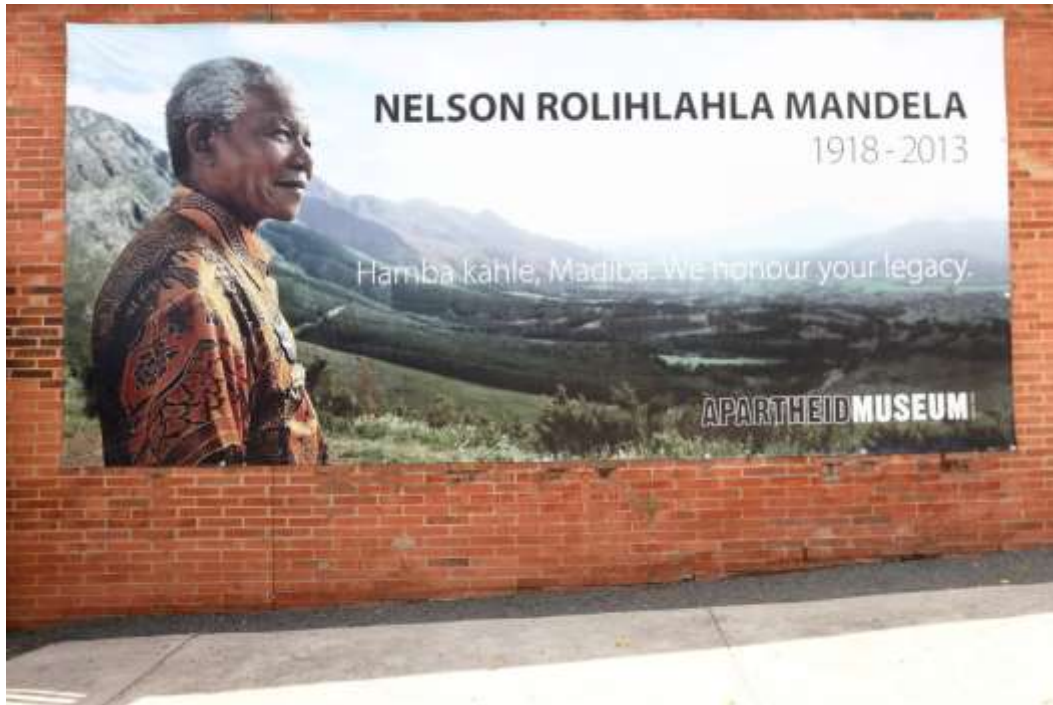
museum before we go to our hotel. The museum is very interesting. It traces Mandela's life and the struggle for freedom after apartheid. Lots of display signs to read and hardly any sitting down space. I wish it were up-to-date on what has happened to South Africa after Mandela.



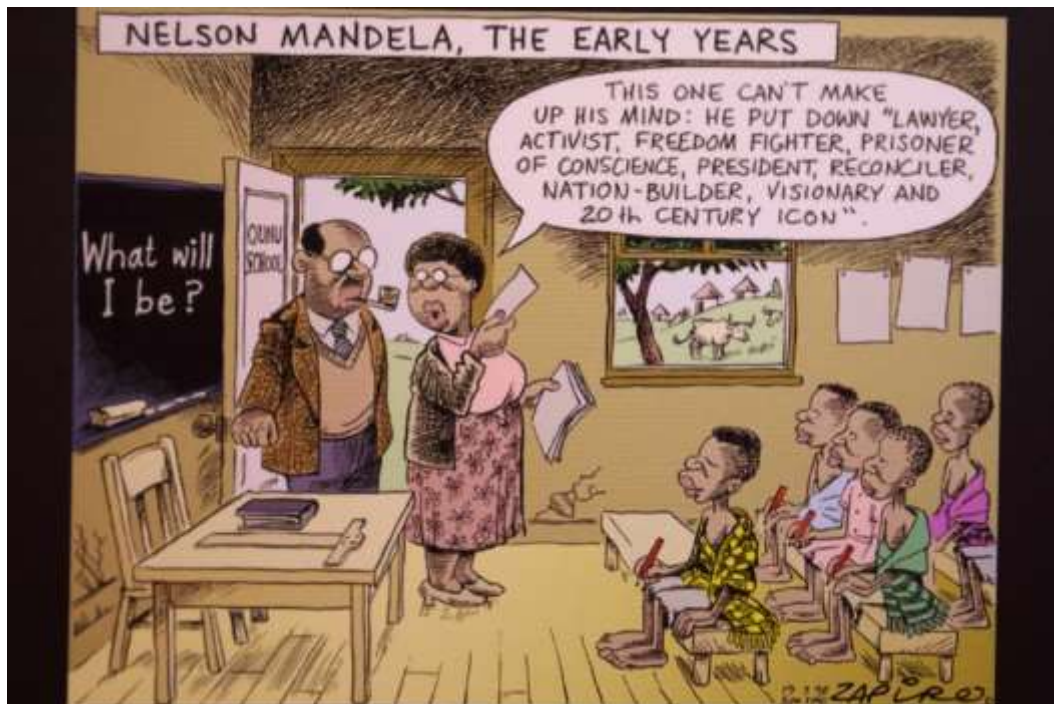
Returning our rental RVs

(Bert) Years ago I read Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom*, amazed at the suffering he endured with Christ-like acceptance while at the same time projecting an image that endeared him to his jailers. Amazingly, after 27 years as a political prisoner he displayed no wrath against the people and government that put him in captivity and instead, as president, established a new constitution and government with equality to all. Walking through the many exhibits at the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg is a refresher of what I had learned previously, but enhanced by many photos and quotes. Although there are many exhibits I could draw attention to, a few struck me more than others. The extremism of apartheid extended to the point of being silly, as illustrated by the decree that civic organizations and clubs had to be racially exclusive and the one and only "non-white" member of the National Bird Watchers' Society was expelled.

Under Mandela's presidency, the Preamble of the new Constitution of the Republic of South Africa is remarkable in its amplified definition of equality: "The state may not unfairly discriminate against anyone on the grounds of race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth." On the humorous side is a series of cartoons about Mandela, the most instructive being Mandela's ambitions as a schoolboy. In fact, long before the major events in Mandela's life, with amazing foresight he told his son he would someday be President of South Africa.



Apartheid Museum



(Shari) On our way to the hotel we stop at the airport to drop off the three couples that are not going with us to Victoria Falls. After taking our luggage to our rooms, most of us meet in the hotel dining room and wait and wait and wait and wait some more for the pizza we ordered. When the pizza finally arrives we devour it as we are very hungry. We find that service is slow in South Africa especially when with a group. I guess we should have ordered the buffet.

## CHAPTER 3. VICTORIA FALLS, ZIMBABWE & BOTSWANA

### Day 34 Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe

(Bert) The view of massive Victoria Falls as depicted on the 1932 postage stamp of Southern Rhodesia intrigued me ever since I added it to my childhood stamp collection. I always wanted to see it in person, although as a 12-year-old that seemed unlikely. Then, much later, when I was in graduate school, one of my good friends was Mufaro Hove, a native of Southern Rhodesia. His father was a Lutheran pastor there and Mufaro came to America for his Ph.D. in chemistry. Again, talking to Mufaro, I thought of visiting Victoria Falls. While writing this, I Googled Mufaro Hove, a popular name, and came up with many hits, although the only reference I am sure is the one I knew refers to his chemistry publication at that time. In 1970, chemistry was on my mind and not the politics of Rhodesia. The 1960s and 70s was a strife full political period for the country which eventually gained its independence and in 1980 was renamed Zimbabwe. Now, today, I am on a jet leaving Johannesburg and bound for Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.



(Shari) Another day of misconceptions on my part, I thought the highlights of the trip were over after our game drives. Wrong again! After a long day of travel on an airplane from Jburg (as the locals call Johannesburg) to Zimbabwe, we check into a fancy hotel and meet our guide Themba who is to take us to Victoria Falls. Far in the distance, we have seen the huge plume of mist emanating from the falls but that is nothing compared to seeing the waterfalls up close. Themba leads us to our first vantage point. My gosh, it is beautiful! We all try to get pictures of us standing in front of the falls and of us with the rainbow behind us and of just the falls itself. Spanning the width of the falls, we take the one-and-half mile path to various overlooks, each one offering yet another spectacular view. We have been issued full-length raincoats which turn out to be a good thing. The wind today is such that we are rained on from the waterfall. In many of the lookouts we are unable to see the drop as it is covered with mist, but with so many lookouts we are given many good views.

(Bert) Victoria Falls, one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the world, is ranked as the world's largest sheet of falling water, as measured by its width and height. After our long walk, stopping at numerous viewpoints, I can testify to the extreme width of the falls, but not the depth as

nowhere can we see the bottom through the dense mist sprayed from the downfall. Torrents of milky green water cascade into the white spray mist, obscuring the deep chasm etched from the basalt laid down by an ancient volcano. I try, mostly unsuccessfully, to photograph the falls, but the suspended mist and rain obscure the views. My sharpest photos are at one of the streams feeding water at the edge of the falls. Thereafter, everything is mist and rainbows.



Minor waterfalls at edge of primary waterfall



Multiple rainbows obscure Victoria Falls





Close-up of one edge of Victoria Falls



As a suggestion of the height of the falls, note the white dot near the center of far right where a group of people are viewing the falls.

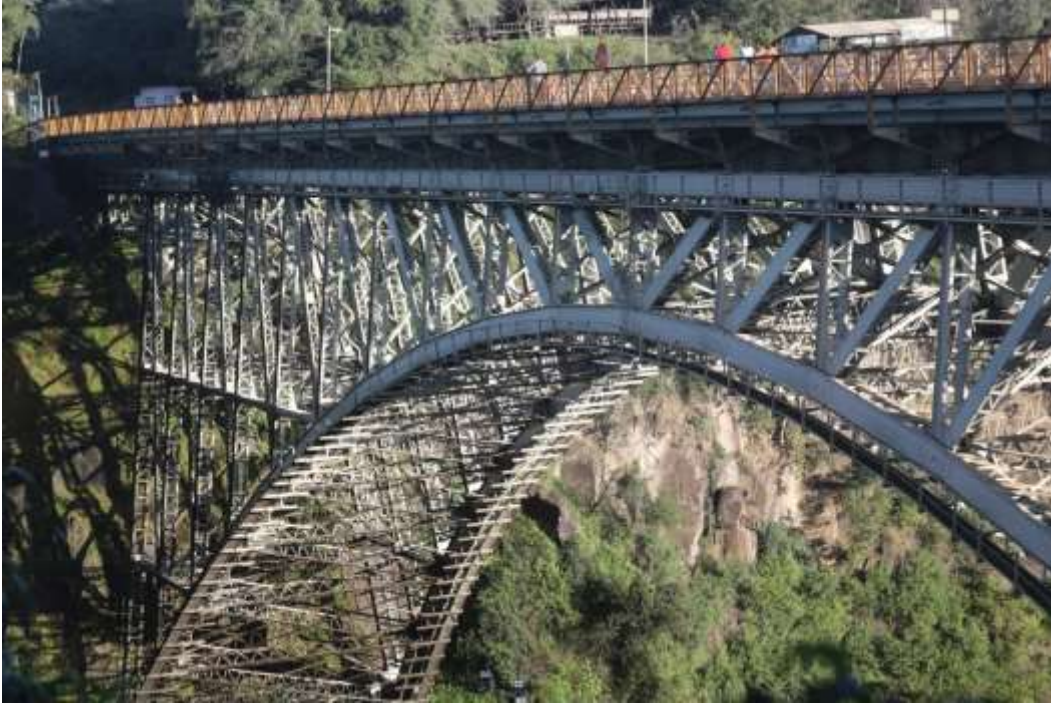






Statue of Dr. David Livingstone, the first European to see Victoria Falls in 1855

(Shari) We reach the end of the falls at the massive bridge over the draining river and then double back. By the time we get back to the hotel, I am exhausted and don't want to walk very far for dinner. Luckily there is a Spurs restaurant in the hotel. Spurs is the first restaurant that we ate at in South Africa and it was delicious food. Byron and Janet join us and we each order a steak. It is an early night for us as morning will come way too soon.



Bridge over Zambezi River at its outfall from Victoria Falls



Bushbuck in the lush rainforest watered by the mist of Victoria Falls

## **Day 35 (part 1: morning) Chobe National Park, Botswana**

(Shari) An early morning breakfast buffet is again set up in a huge two-story gallery open to the outside. It is so chilly this morning that I dine while keeping my sweatshirt on and wonder what happens when it really gets cold. Again we have a buffet with all we can eat, including made-to-order omelets and the ever present baked tomatoes, a sundry of sausages and pork and beans, and roasted potatoes each in their separate simmering pot. I am also happy to see the cold cut trays and search out the smoked salmon. No bagels again, but cream cheese is available this time and on toast, it is my breakfast of choice.

(Bert) Victoria Falls lies near the triangular junction of three countries: Zimbabwe, Botswana and Zambia and is very close to Angola and Namibia. With passports in hand, we are on a bus traveling west to the border with Botswana. A major bridge has broken and truck traffic has been rerouted to this border. Hundreds of semis line the road and our guide tells us their wait at crossing the border is several weeks. For us, it is merely a formality and we are soon on our way into Botswana, heading toward Chobe National Park.

(Shari) Today we are taken to Botswana by bus. We travel about an hour, stopped once by a whole school full of baboons, called a parliament of baboons. Hundreds are in a tree and take the opportunity to scamper down and cross the highway in front of us. I say hundreds and mean hundreds. They just keep coming and coming. I wish I had seen them in the tree beforehand because it must have looked funny—monkey fruit on a tree without leaves. We reach the border about 9 AM and this too reminds me of our trip to Central America. We have to get out of one country and into another. Even in Africa, those little slips of paper that we get when we arrive and give up when we depart are an important part of the process. It seems so silly to me but I suppose it has a purpose though no one knows what that purpose is. Each of us has to get off the bus, get in line, present ourselves at the Zimbabwe border, hand over our passport at a window, answer a question or two, get our passport stamped, and shuffle to the next window to repeat a similar process. Then it is back onto another vehicle (our safari truck of the day), drive a couple of blocks, get off the bus and repeat the process at the Botswana border. We finally all pass and make our way a few miles to the game reserve.



Chacma Baboons



Trucks lined up at Zimbabwe-Botswana border

(Shari) Sightings start out lame and I am thinking nothing can beat Sabi Sabi, but again I am wrong. We hear of a lion and make a mad dash to see it. Unlike Sabi Sabi, our guide is not supposed to go off road. But he does, briefly, and we get so close to the lion that I instinctively move away. They tell me not to worry as the lion does not see me as a person but part of a larger whole truck. We get really nice close looks at giraffes and elephants and Bert of course has the guide stop for bird pictures. I don't want the rest of the group to get upset that we may miss a leopard or something because we spend too much time on birds so when it is a bird I know he has seen many times before I begin to nag and hurry him along.

(Bert) It amazes me that so many animals can be packed so densely within the national parks. We are rarely without something to draw our attention: crocodiles, cape buffalo, impalas, warthogs, elephants, hippopotamuses, giraffes, lions, plus new creatures, puku and water monitor. Birds are more varied and plentiful than any other day so far, thanks in part to our obliging driver/guide who stops long enough for photos.





Cape Buffalo



Water Monitor, South Africa's largest lizard, measuring over 6 ft. in length



Lion lying in shade of bush looks up at me while I photograph



Puku, a much localized antelope found in South Africa only along the Chobe River of Botswana



(Bert) Our safari vehicle is following a male elephant in hot pursuit of a female with on juvenile when we break out of the closed-in forest and come across a large open area that is the gathering place for dozens of giraffes and elephants. One of the giraffes splays its forelegs while keeping its hind legs close together, thus forming a tripod from which it can lower its head to the ground, perhaps to lick up minerals. I'm told that the giraffe can only assume this position temporarily because giraffes have powerful hearts, weighting up to 24 lbs., with blood pressure of 280/180 mm pumping blood at twice that of humans, up the long length of its neck to its head. When inverted, the blood floods the grounded head and, in time, could harm the giraffe. We continue down the dirt path to where it narrows. Ahead of us is the other safari vehicle assigned to our group and to its right is a huge elephant that doesn't like where he stands. Considering us a mere inconvenience, the elephant passes through the narrow gap between vehicles and walks past our left side so closely that my photograph highlights its eyelashes.



Male elephant in pursuit





Portion of dozens of elephants and giraffes in open field



Giraffe reaching to the ground



Elephant crosses between our two vehicles



Close enough to study the elephant's long eye lashes

(Bert) Owls are one of my most sought after bird families because their nocturnal habits make them elusive. So when we stop to look at a huge owl deeply hidden in leaves and twigs of a dark tree, I want a better look. The driver jockeys back and forth trying to get us a clear view and finally I get some full body shots only partially dimmed by obscuring twigs. It is a Verreaux's

Eagle-Owl, also called Giant Eagle-Owl because it is the largest owl in Southern Africa. Curiously, it has pink eyelids.



Verreaux's (Giant) Eagle-Owl



Pink eyelids

## **Day 35 (part 2: afternoon) Chobe National Park, Botswana**

(Shari) We are driven to a wonderful lodge on the Chobe River for a buffet lunch. After we eat, we begin our boat cruise. It too starts out slowly but then we see the hippos and the elephants. The hippos are quite close and Mr. Hippo thinks we want to take his bride from him so marks his territory by pooping in the water and whirling his tail like a fast fan blade. The elephants want to take a bath but seem leery of us. We move away, the elephant comes to the water and we move back to watch. Another group of elephants downstream are also bathing with giraffes looking on. We could just sit and watch this show forever but alas we have to return and repeat the border crossings in reverse. It has been a wonderful day and about half of us walk to an Indian-Southeast Asian restaurant for dinner. It just does not get better than this.





(Bert) This has been by far the best bird photography day, with clear blue skies to provide ample lighting. On the negative side, the confinement of the safari vehicle and the boat sometimes has limited my shooting direction and forced me to shoot into the sun, but with photo-editing I usually can at least get a recognizable photo. On the positive side, the truck and boat act as hides and allow closer approach to the birds and animals than if I were on foot. I viewed 47 bird species today, of which I photographed 42 species. Here are some samples:



Marabou Stork



Lilac-breasted Roller



Knob-billed Duck



White-headed Vulture



Love birds: African Fish Eagles



Blacksmith Lapwing sitting on eggs



Little Bee-eater



Natal Spurfowl



Grey-headed Kingfisher



White-crowned Lapwing



Water Thick-knee



African Darter



African Jacana

A gathering of vultures on the dried grasslands adjoining the Chobe River intrigue me. I take lots of photos for identification and later am amazed at the variety. In one photograph I capture four of the five vulture species I see today.



White-headed Vulture (foreground left) and Hooded Vulture (behind it and front center). Lappet-faced Vulture (back, left), White-backed Vultures (right), Cape Vulture (far right)

While I'm often preoccupied with birds, this afternoon's entertainment is mostly a day at the beach for elephants and hippopotamuses. Shari has already mentioned the rotating tail for the defecating hippo, a manure spreader I would not want to approach too closely. With less drama, an elephant pollutes the water simply by arching its back and shooting out over-sized baseballs of poop. In addition to the significant population of crocodiles, I now have another reason not to swim in the Chobe River.

I have many of these animal antics captured on video and most entertaining is watching an elephant take its bath. It lumbers into the water until three-fourths submerged, though keeping its proboscis U-turned up as a snorkel. Then it dives headfirst into the river, disappearing below the surface. In an explosion of spray, it emerges ivory tusks first, then head and floppy ears. For a moment the elephant sits in the shallow water like a fat lady sunbathing at the beach. Its light gray hide, often dusty with tossed mud baths, is now glossy black. Refreshed and while munching on a tuft of seagrass, it gracefully walks out of the river and onto the beach.















## Day 35 bird list Chobe National Park, Botswana

(Bert) Since the day at Chobe National Park was so successful for bird photography, I have tabulated here the birds I photographed and otherwise saw.

### Photographed (42):

|                              |                              |                              |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Muscovy                      | Namaqua Dove                 | Natal Spurrowl               |
| White-browed Sparrow-weaver  | Reed Cormorant               | Grey-headed Kingfisher       |
| Long-tailed Paradise Whydah  | Pied Kingfisher              | White-crowned Lapwing        |
| Tawny Eagle                  | African Sacred Ibis          | Blue Waxbill                 |
| Squacco Heron                | Lappet-faced Vulture         | Fork-tailed Drongo           |
| Little Egret                 | Cape Vultures                | Water Thick-knee             |
| Knob-billed Duck             | White-backed Vulture         | African Darter               |
| African Fish Eagle           | White-headed Vulture         | African Jacana               |
| Red-billed Teal              | Hooded Vulture               | Yellow-billed (Intermediate) |
| Egyptian Goose               | Blacksmith Lapwing           | Egret                        |
| Marabou Stork                | Bateleur                     | Grey Heron                   |
| White-fronted Bee-eater      | Southern Red-billed Hornbill | Lesser Moorhen               |
| Lilac-breasted Roller        | Little Bee-eater             | Spur-winged Goose            |
| Verreaux's (Giant) Eagle-Owl | Great Egret                  |                              |
| Pale Chanting Goshawk        | Helmeted Guineafowl          |                              |

### Additional species seen (5):

|                        |                      |              |
|------------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| House Sparrow          | Little Swift         | Go-away Bird |
| Lesser Striped Swallow | Bennett's Woodpecker |              |

## Day 36 Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe

(Shari) Ah, I get to sleep in and do not need to get rudely awakened by my alarm. I leisurely get dressed and then we head over for breakfast for my fix of salmon and cream cheese. We meet the group for our long anticipated shopping trip. We each brought clothes that we no longer want and to use them in trade for items at the market. As soon as we reach the entrance to the market we are accosted by men (strangely no women selling things) telling us to look at their stuff. Look how inexpensive it is (but without quoting a price)! See this up here! Do you like this jewelry? They are a nuisance and even stand in front of me so I cannot walk to the other vendors. I am unable to look closely at anything and am only able to get a cursory glance at what is available. When I settle for a map of Africa carved in wood with the Big 5 animals in it, I am ready to bargain. I find that the price will come down to half of the asking, with or without the clothes. The vendors hang on to the clothes before I have even settle on a price. I buy the map and I buy some bowls, later finding that I could have avoided the hassle and gotten the bowls cheaper elsewhere. We leave the market before the group and find Jim and Linda and Paul and Donna in the open air Asian restaurant enjoying a beer. They too found it frustrating. By and Janet join us a bit later and we compare our purchases. All of us agree that we did not like the experience.

(Bert) I read Shari's journal before writing mine. My experience was not as frustrating as hers. I simply moved on from booth to booth after looking at their wares and listening to their comments. After completing the circle I narrow my first choice to two carved leopards, one of wood and one of stone. I settle on the most unusual, a very heavy (8 lb.) stone carving from Zambesi Rock. It is unique among the thousands of articles here. The vendor, who is also the carver, shows much interest in my cap, one jacket, two small boxes of crayons for his daughter, and my shoes. He will trade for those plus US\$80. The clothes are of no consequence to me and they would have ended up at Good Will anyway, and the crayons were free when we visited a restaurant in Miami. I counter with \$40, he groans and offers \$70. I offer \$50. He reminds me he must cover the cost of materials, looks at the rest of the clothes in my bag, and says he will trade for these as well (more shirts, worthless to me) and \$55. I accept. I take a photo of Khambulari Lunga, a Zulu young man, holding his leopard carving, now mine.



Khambulari Lunga holding this carving from Zambesi Rock

(Shari) Soon it is time to go to our taxi to take us to the helicopter ride over Victoria Falls. Now this excursion is worth every penny we paid. Even our pictures show how beautiful and expansive the falls really are. I love the helicopter. Unlike float planes, it is quiet and we can talk to each other. The lift up is effortless as is coming down. I never feel scared at all: unusual for me for sure. I just look out the window in awe of the beauty. I have to pinch myself at times to see if I am dreaming, especially when we see elephants and giraffes on the ground.

(Bert) With my pent-up anxiousness to see Victoria Falls, I was a bit disappointed at the mist that interfered with most views, but I looked forward to the helicopter ride I knew we would do today. We have taken small planes before to see the landscape from the air, but never a helicopter. What a difference! Incredibly smooth and quiet, the helicopter ride is like I've always envisioned being a vulture soaring effortlessly above the world. The deep blue river is smooth and flat until it oxygenates and foams white as it precipitates vertically into a deep dark chasm obscured by mist. The edge of the waterfall is abundantly visible and the short distance across the chasm is obvious. Only this gap has eroded, and the same is true as our helicopter follows the serpentine path of the river and its water swept canyon. Awesome!



I alternate, nearly nonstop, between my long lens camera for close-ups and my iPhone for broad views. We circle Victoria Falls several times and then swing wide to include the surrounding national parks. We get a bird's eye view of wandering elephants, browsing giraffes, swimming hippopotamuses, and lounging crocodiles.



Schematic drawing of the falls from the air



6-passenger helicopter



Victoria Falls from our helicopter ride





Bridge over Zambesi River



Deep canyons carved from basalt downriver from Victoria Falls



Crocodile and Egyptian Geese from the air



Muddy path of hippo churning through Zambesia River



A giraffe looks up to us



View of elephant from above

(Shari) The day is not over and we still have a boat cruise to take. This is not a wildlife viewing boat but billed as a sunset cruise on the Zambezi. All the liquor we want to drink and a nice plate of snacks are put on the tables in front of us as we cruise down the river awaiting sunset. It is a nice relaxing time and I think everyone enjoys the trip.



Yawning hippo



White-faced Whistling-Duck (lowest) with Fulvous Whistling Ducks



Sunset on Zambezi River

## CHAPTER 4. CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

### Day 37 Flight to Cape Town

(Bert) Two days ago when we were crossing back from Botswana to Zimbabwe, Marcia met a young man who designs and prints custom T-shirts. She arranged to get one with a map of Southern Africa. Yesterday when the man came to the hotel he showed a sample T-shirt and even proposed to add the route of our itinerary and many in the group order one. Today, just before we leave for the airport, he delivers a bundle of T-shirts and I photograph Janet as she models hers.







T-shirt shows our RV route in southwest South Africa, our flight and route around Victoria Falls, and our flight to Cape Town

(Bert) Our first flight transports us from Victoria Falls to Johannesburg. The flight is uneventful but, as usual, passing through customs, lugging our luggage, checking in for the second flight, going through security screening yet again, and waiting at the terminal is tedious. Our second flight takes us to Cape Town at the southern tip of Africa. Again, the flight is uneventful. We arrive in early evening and are surprised that no bus is waiting to take us to the downtown hotel. Earlier in the day Marcia had confirmed the transportation with the hotel and now Bobby and Marcia are making several calls to find what went wrong. Although it never became clear to me who was responsible for the snafu, the plan changes from bus to a fleet of taxis, back to a bus, and then finally the hotel bus pulling a trailer large enough to take the luggage. Through the transitions in mode of transport, each responsible person assures us it will only take 15 minutes. Unfortunately, 15 minutes is not the same in every language, so it isn't until 10 PM that we arrive and get into our hotel rooms.

## Day 38 Robben Island

(Shari) Today's outing starts with a mile walk to the ferry. We are taking it across the sea to Robben Island, the isolated location of the prison where Nelson Mandela was held for 18 of his 27 years of incarceration. I am glad nobody told me about weather conditions and how rough the sea can get between the mainland and the island. Fortunately, today the sea is pretty calm and our crossing is uneventful. The ferry is full and when we reach the island all the people are directed to four buses, each with its own guide. Marcia runs ahead to make sure we all can get on the same bus. As the bus circles the island our guide talks about its history and the now vacant buildings.

(Bert) After a good night's sleep and a hearty breakfast, we head out early on a walk to the dock to take the first boat to Robben Island. Skies are bright blue with a clear view of Table Mountain as the backdrop of the coastal city of Cape Town. Seas are calm with a few gently rolling swells, a happenstance that is not always the case. Robben Island, once a leper colony, then a prison system, became the penitentiary for Nelson Mandela and other political activists. A bus takes us around the island with a knowledgeable resident guide that points out the leper cemetery, the limestone quarry where Mandela and others broke rocks, and the cave where they retreated during breaks to get out of the piercingly bright light that damaged their eyes. As additional cruelty, the prisoners were not allowed sunglasses to limit the lime dust and the intense sunlight.



Cape Town and Table Mountain



Limestone quarry where political prisoners broke rocks and sought respite in the cave

(Bert) While our guide is talking about isolation of political prisoner Robert Sobukwe I notice an African Penguin emerging from shrubbery. I see more when we reach the rocky beach. Once named Jackass Penguins because of their braying call, they are an endangered species whose population has been dropped by half since 2004. Even rarer are the African Oystercatchers I watch climbing over seaweed strewn boulders and the gravelly beach. In 2014 their population was reported as only 6,670 individuals. Overhead of the oystercatchers and cormorants flies a small flock of African Sacred Ibises.



African Penguin



African Oystercatcher



African Sacred Ibis

(Bert) We cross the island and encounter the quite small steenbok, an antelope with two sharply pointed spikes protruding from its skull. While the steenbok is native, the next we see is a European Fallow Deer, introduced from Europe.



Steenbok



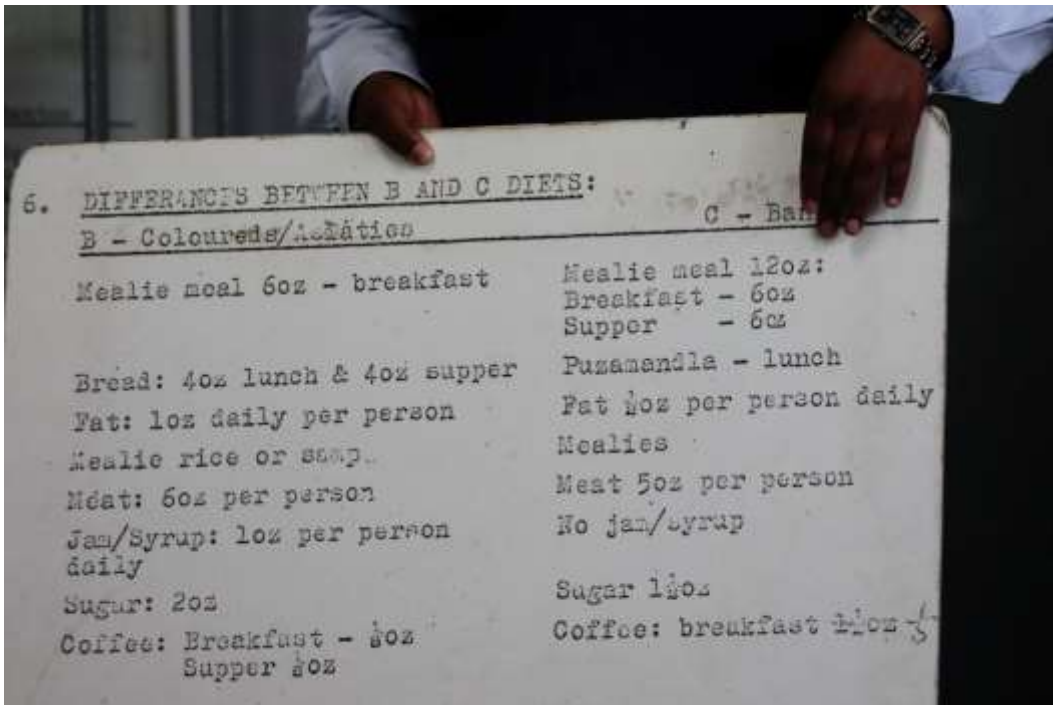
European Fallow Deer

(Bert) Our bus drops us off at the building containing the prison cells where Mandela and other political prisoners were confined. Our tour guide is a burly man with a voice an octave lower than commonplace. A former inmate on Robben Island, he maintains a very serious tone as he recites the Spartan conditions of imprisonment. At the onset of Mandela's stay, beds were not allowed and he and others slept on thin mats lying on the concrete floor. Winters could be harshly cold, especially with open barred windows and only a single blanket. The former prisoner holds up a chart outlining the food rations, severe for "coloureds and Asiatics" and barely livable for Blacks. Prisoners were not addressed by their names but, instead, as numbers. While physical abuse in the form of striking was not administered, psychological abuse was commonplace. We are taken to the prison cell formerly occupied by Nelson Mandela for 18 of the 27 years he served behind bars before the fall of apartheid. When the tour is completed, we take "the short walk to freedom" back to the harbor from whence we return to the mainland.

(Shari) When we get off the bus at the prison, we are handed to another guide. He was a former political prisoner and now makes the tour just a little more special and personal. He shows us and tells us of the stark conditions. I don't think the prisoners were mistreated physically but their accommodations were not comfortable. I would not want to sleep on a mat on the hard floor or go to the bathroom in a pail. I cannot imagine living like that day in and day out or doing the hard labor expected of them.



A former political prisoner at Robben Island is our guide



Daily food rations, more severe for blacks than coloureds



Exercise courtyard where Nelson Mandela planted a garden



Prison cell. Windows were added after Mandela's release.



(Bert) While waiting for the ferry to reach the harbor, I take note of the hundreds of gulls, terns, and cormorants, puzzling over their identity. Eventually I conclude I'm seeing Kelp Gulls, Grey-headed Gulls, Lesser Crested Terns, Swift Terns, and Cape Cormorants. On the return trip we are passed by huge flocks of thousands of cormorants and, at the dock, many thousands more cormorants are resting on the opposite pilings.



Grey-headed Gull



Lesser Crested Terns



Swift Tern

(Shari) After our tour we return to the mainland and have the rest of the day free. We all head to the food court in the nearby mall and many of us order falafel or Asian. After lunch it is shopping time. I do my part in keeping the economy of Cape Town vibrant. I have been waiting to make my purchases as I did not want to lug them all around. Now I just have to get it in my suitcase and check my suitcase on the airline. Unfortunately when I get back to the hotel, the purchases will not all fit and I will have an additional carryon.

## **Day 39 Boulders Beach and Cape of Good Hope**

(Shari) After breakfast we board a big bus capable of holding 40 to 50 people, so each of us gets a window seat. We take the shoreline drive and see sights I never dreamed of in Africa: ritzy high rise apartments for the rich overlooking lovely beaches and rocky vistas.

(Bert) Cape fur seals swim near the dock where one man is cleaning fish and another is offering discarded morsels to one seal. He leans over, arm extended, fingers gingerly holding a tiny edge of a fish fin while the bulk droops down. The fur seal sees the bait and with a flip of its powerful tail it jumps half its body length from the water and mouths the fish fragment.



(Bert) It's our first stop on a chartered bus tour around the cape. Others are pouring over the myriad souvenir attractions spread out on mats across the harbor decks. Refreshingly, these are all African crafted, absent of "Made in China" stickers.

(Shari) At a seaside village, most of the women shop the vendor booths. Many of the items are same-old-same-old but one. I had seen this bowl in Shakaland at the beginning of the trip but thought it too expensive. I have never seen it again and was kicking myself for not purchasing it. Well, here it is. It has carved animals along the ridge and painted zebras in the bowl part. I want it and try to get the vendor to negotiate a better price. Both Donna and I like the bowl. We walk away but I know I'll be back and I am. I purchase a bowl. I take comfort in the fact that the price was less than it was in Shakaland.



Carved wooden giraffes and face masks, painted ostrich eggshells, and crafted dolls

(Shari) The best sight for the day is the penguins. They are nesting and the young are quite big if not feathered out in adult plumage. I just love watching these birds and we have to depart way too soon. I know Bert is frustrated that he can't stay longer.

(Bert) The bus follows the contours of the coastline, stopping a few times to take in the mountain scenery, and then an important stop at Boulders, beach home of the African Penguins. Obviously a highlight for me, the penguins are amazingly accessible from the boardwalk extending over the beach. Unlike the penguins we have watched in New Zealand, these are active in daylight and we watch them hiding in subterranean cavities, marching up and down the beach, tending to young, lounging on rocks, and swimming in the bay. Penguins are so unbirdlike, if there is such a word, as they walk awkwardly upright like the Tin Man of the Wizard of Oz, shuffling black grooved swim flippers one step at a time, holding downward stiff

flippers that look more like canoe paddles than wings, sporting fine feathers so tiny they appear more like a soft fur coat than rigid distinctly-separated flight feathers, yet at the same time adorned in tuxedo-like black and white. As clearly becomes evident these African Penguins breed year-round. Some sit on nests hollowed out of the sand, their adult bodies barely covering a half-grown chick. Others stand erectly, like bowling pins, beside two or three fuzzy brown, nearly full-size, juveniles that haven't as yet adopted adult plumage.





(Bert) We stop for an early lunch at an outdoor restaurant that overlooks the bay. I'm still filled from the hotel's ample breakfast buffet, so I leave the others and hike near the cliff edge and into a caravan park that we should consider for a future trip. Strikingly colorful bird-of-paradise blooms are attracting equally colorful sunbirds that are reminiscent of hummingbirds, but larger. Like hummingbirds, which don't occur in the Old World, these sunbirds are pollinating the flowers.



Southern Double-collared Sunbird



Orange-breasted Sunbird

(Shari) We stop for lunch at a seaside restaurant and Bert forgoes eating to bird. Janet and I share a delicious seafood assortment of shrimp, clams, fish, and mussels. After lunch we continue along the coast to The Cape of Good Hope and a cog rail ride to a lighthouse.

(Bert) Our next stop is another one of those places I never thought I'd visit in my lifetime: the Cape of Good Hope, southern tip of Africa. I am delighted to find that the cape has been preserved as a national park, so the land and cliffs we stand on are pretty much the same as viewed by Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias and his crew in 1486, long before black people settled in the area. They were the first Europeans to sail around the southern point of the continent and Dias named it Cabo de Boa Esperanca, Cape of Good Hope. From childhood history stories, I thought Vasco da Gamma was the first, but he sailed around the cape nine years later while exploring a trade route to India. When Dias sailed he encountered stormy seas. Today clear skies, little wind, and only rolling surf breaks on the rocky shore. A funicular carries us most of the way up the mountain and from there we climb rock hewn stairs to the pinnacle and historical lighthouse (1860-1919) for a 360° view of the cape.



View from lighthouse at Cape of Good Hope





Cape of Good Hope

At a lower level I spot a pair of Ostriches, the male boldly black with a gray neck, the female a drab brown. Nearby are two Elands, a very large antelope we have not previously seen in the wild. Our bus tour continues around the cape, past magnetic scenery that attracts the urge to stay longer. I'm glad we have a couple more days left for exploration.



Female and male Common Ostrich



Eland

(Shari) We get back in time for supper at a unique food court, catering to local and unusual fare. Last night we ordered a Kadu Kebab, lamb kebab, and Greek baklava at the Persian booth and jalapeno poppers at the Mexican booth. Tonight Bert orders an African shish kabob that skewers flame grilled ostrich, crocodile, zebra and warthog. I order a pizza and beer to share.

## **Day 40 Table Mountain and Cape Town**

(Shari) We meet Marcia across the street as she is to hand us our tickets for the two day pass on the Hop On Hop Off bus. We have really enjoyed these types of tours as it gives a great overview of a city for relatively low cost. Most of the group decides to take the red route bus and head to Table Mountain. It is a cloudless day with no wind, a perfect time for a visit. Upon arriving at the highest drivable location, we buy gondola tickets and have little wait to get on as we are early in the morning. The big gondola turns 360° as it moves up the mountain, but I do not notice this as I am sitting down in the non-rotating middle with people rotating past me. I do not do heights well. The view from the top is fantastic and we all take pictures of each other at various viewpoints.

(Bert) Cape Town is undoubtedly one of the most attractive coastal cities in the world. From almost any seaside vantage point, most prominent is the backdrop of flat-topped Table Mountain looming 3,563 ft. above sea level. This morning we take the Hop On Hop Off bus to the cable car that carries us the rest of the way to the top. Paved pathways meandering across the flat top lead us to multiple views of the city, suburbs clinging to coastal bays, and the rugged nature reserve at the Cape of Good Hope.



Cape Town skyscrapers



Cable car to Table Mountain



Coastal suburbs of Cape Town



View from cable car climbing Table Mountain



Everyone wants a personal photo with dramatic backdrop views from Table Mountain

(Bert) Dubbed the Cape Floral Kingdom, the botanical surrounds of the cape feature some 8500 plant species including 2285 that are found nowhere else. Nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, its small size uniquely encompasses one of only six recognized plant kingdoms. To the layman, the most well-known is the huge bloom of the protea which is popular in floral displays even in the United States. As we walk around Table Mountain we see some of these rare species, though my focus is more on moving objects and I spot an unfamiliar bird with the contrarian name, Familiar Chat. It reminds me of a wren, but it assumes a more erect posture. I find an Orange-breasted Sunbird again, but this time it is the less colorful female.

Most unusual is the Rock Dassie, also called Rock Hyrax, a cute, plump, furry animal a bit like an oversized guinea pig with diminutive ears and no obvious tail. Although my first guess would be that it is a rodent, zoologists believe its closest living relative is the elephant. I first saw one of these dassies at sea level at the penguin colony and now this one atop a mountain over 3500 ft. higher. That's an amazing diversity in habitat and, presumably, climate.



Familiar Chat



Orange-breasted Sunbird (female)



Rock Dassie or Rock Hyrax

(Shari) We get on the bus to continue the tour and stop for lunch at a seaside restaurant. Unfortunately this red route repeats much of what we did yesterday but it is in the opposite direction so seems a little different. The restaurant would be perfect had it not been for the loud construction going on next door. It's back on the bus and a transfer to the yellow route to visit the inner city district. Bert and I decide to walk to the District 6 Museum as we figure we will get there quicker than the bus as it is only a few blocks. Little did we know we would be walking through a huge market area with vendors in all directions as far as the eye can see. So many things I would like to take home but have no room in the luggage! The museum itself is a bit of a disappointment to me. It houses artifacts of the area at the time of Apartheid and how the people of color were told they had to leave their homes. The story is sad and the world needs to know of it, I just think it could be told in a better way. We watch a movie in a display room where the staff is talking loudly, making it hard to hear the film. I end up falling asleep (I guess it could not have been too loud or the noise had settled down by then). Bert tells me the movie lasted 50 min. My goodness, I needed the rest I guess. Bert continues looking at the displays and I decide to have my favorite cappuccino at the café in the next room, after which I start looking for him. Apparently he was looking for me for a half hour but could not find me and was about ready to go back to the hotel, thinking I had left without him. My goodness, I never would have left him.

(Bert) We catch a different Hop On Hop Off bus so that we can return to the city and then stop within a short walk to the District Six Museum which houses memorials to the events and people affected by an ill-advised apartheid scheme that in 1966 leveled low-income housing and evicted 60,000 inhabitants of what was once was a close and ethnically most diverse population essentially at peace with one another. Leaving with little more than a suitcase, for their expulsion from District Six, they were offered nothing in return. I listen to a long video by one

of the former residents telling the story. Poignantly, he points out the irony in a sign posted at the time and now in the museum. It reads “These premises and the amenities thereof have been reserved for the exclusive use of white persons.” Notably, the “public” is “white persons” and blacks, Asians, and coloreds are not of public interest, nor do they hold any rights.



Historical remnant of 1966 eviction notice from District Six

(Bert) Absent of a returning bus, Shari and I exhaustively walk the sidewalks for two hours to reach the harbor in time for the 5 PM ferry ride. We arrive early enough to have a beer while recovering in the deckchairs overlooking the harbor. The menu looks good, so we plan on returning for dinner. The rather short height of the boat—facilitating passing under a low bridge—gives us a new perspective of Cape Town. To my interest, under the bridge I photograph some extremely close Cape Cormorants nesting on a ledge. Later, the boat captain takes us close to the shipping dock to see a Cape fur seal sleeping in an oversized rubber tire that serves as a ship bumper.

(Shari) Rather than spend 90 min. on a bus route we’ve already seen twice, we decide to walk back. The 3-mi. walk takes us through the market and this time I buy a big piece of African fabric to use as a wall hanging. Cape Town has a bit of a vagrant problem and I see policemen all around. But if a policeman is not watching, young men come up asking for a handout and keep pestering and pestering. That I do not like. The walk back gets tiring and because my phone has no battery power, I am without a GPS. Relying on Bert for directions, we go somewhat out of the way. However, we do get to the area where the harbor cruise is to take off. We are a half hour early to meet the group so we stop for beer at a restaurant on the waterfront and look at their menu. It looks good for dinner we think. No one of our group arrives for the 5 PM cruise so we take it ourselves wondering what happened to others. We find out that a bunch



missed their bus and did not get back to the hotel until 6. Byron and Janet walked back from the museum district too but then did some shopping.



Cape Cormorant on nest

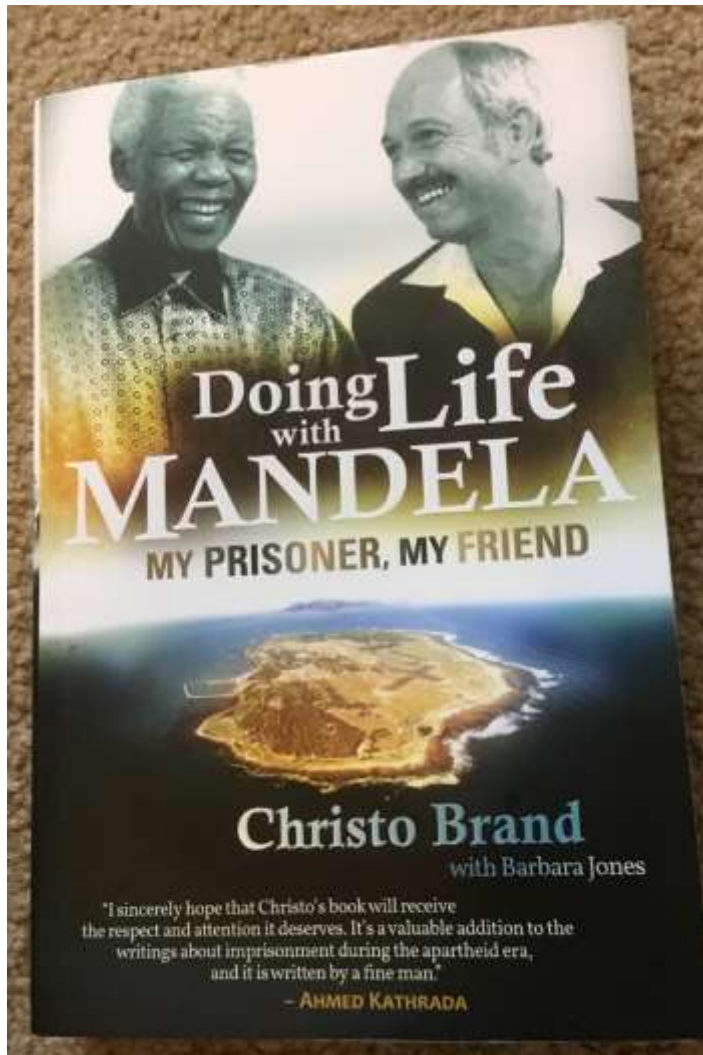


Sleeping Cape fur seal

(Shari) At 6:30 we meet for a talk by one of Nelson Mandela's guards. He is so entrancing that I think all of us bought his book. After the talk, Byron and Janet join us for dinner at the restaurant I mentioned earlier. Janet and Bert get the best meal: a fish called King-Click and from the taste Bert gives me, it is delicious.

(Bert) I looked up the scrumptious fish Janet and I had for dinner. It is actually kingklip fish, an eel-like fish found in the Southern Hemisphere off Argentina, Chile, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Another reference gives its proper name as bearded brotula and says the fish is also found in the Gulf of Mexico.

The group meets with Christo Brand and his wife in the hotel's private lounge. Mr. Brand was 19 years old when as a prison warder, only briefly at his new career, is assigned to Robben Island. Here he meets South Africa's most notorious prisoner, sentenced to life imprisonment. Nelson Mandela was 60 and had already been at Robben Island many years. Incredibly, and with great risk to his job, Mr. Brand and Nelson Mandela become close confidants and friends. Mr. Brand gives us a 30-min. synopsis of his life with Mandela, both in prison and long afterward when he accompanied Mandela move to another prison, is ultimately released, and becomes President. At Mandela's strong encouragement, Christo Brand wrote a book of their shared experiences, though on different sides of the bars. I anxiously purchase a copy of his book and look forward to reading it.



## Day 41 Botanical Garden and Wine Estates

(Shari) Today we have another free day to use our Hop On Hop Off bus ticket. I'm glad we went to Table Mountain yesterday as today is cloudy, cool, and windy and probably the gondola would not even be open. LuAnn joins Byron, Janet, Bert, and me for the green route tour. Later we find that the others are a little bit ahead of us. Our first stop is the botanical gardens. The best feature of the garden is the swinging hanging bridge built high in the air so we can overlook the garden setting. The next best feature is the gift store. It is a wonderful gift store and I find a few things to purchase but the checkout line is too long if we want to catch the next bus so I forgo purchasing any items. I figure I can still get these gifts at the airport.

(Bert) With so much to see and do in the Cape Town area, we are again on the Hop On Hop Off bus this morning. First stop is the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden. Set against the eastern slope of Table Mountain, its splendor marks it as one of the great botanic gardens of the world. We are here in off season for blooms, so some of the grandeur is dulled. Nonetheless, the landscaped layout, the wandering pathways often under a high ceilinged arch of aged trees,

and the unique artistically designed tree canopy walkway are stunning with or without flowering plants. So, is the bird life.



Southern Double-Collared Sunbird



Natal Spurfowl



Karoo Prinia (juvenile)



Malachite Sunbird (eclipsed male) on *Kniphofia baurii*



Cape Robin-Chat





Tree canopy walkway





(Bert) My time at the botanical gardens is too short. Others are anxious to visit the wine estates built on the slopes of Table Mountain and overlooking the city and harbor. The first we visit is Groot Constantia, the oldest vineyard having originated in the 1700s by Dutch settlers. It was in private hands until 1885 when it was sold to the Government of the Cape Colony. Shari, Byron, Janet, and LuAnn order wine samplers. I'm not ready for wine before noon, so I get ice cream. They all savor the wines and seem to favor Pinotage, a local special blend. Shari allows me one sip from her glass and I agree.

(Shari) Our next stop is one of the many wineries of the area. We check into getting a tasting tour but decide to purchase lunch and wine instead and make our own tasting at the restaurant. We order one cheese plate to share, four red wine tasting plates, each with five wine samples, and one ice cream for Bert. Next stop is another winery with its tasting room set high on the hillside overlooking the vineyards.





Groot Constantia Wine Estate



Wine sampler

(Bert) From Groot Constantia we move to Beau Constantia, a rather new vineyard. This time I am ready for samples and concur the Cape wines are excellent. We inquire about taking some

home and find out a bottle is quite inexpensive if drunk in Cape Town, but to ship a bottle to the U.S. would be over \$500 as they have no distributors abroad.



Beau Constantia Wine Estate

(Shari) We purchase more tastings before realizing we'd better hurry along or miss the last bus home. We don't want to miss our farewell dinner. The dinner is served at the hotel and is another bountiful buffet, complete with a dessert tower. The dinner is bittersweet as it is our last and we reminisce about all our fun times.

(Bert) Our farewell dinner is tonight. It really seems like the third farewell after finishing the ship tour in Barcelona, the South Africa tour in Johannesburg, and now the Victoria Falls tour ending here in Cape Town. Tomorrow I'll write about how we get back to the U.S.

## **Day 42-44 The way home**

(Bert) Except for packing and breakfast we have a leisurely start to the morning. We say goodbye to Byron, Janet, and Randy as they have an earlier flight. Then at 10 AM the rest of us board the bus to the airport for the flight to Doha, Qatar. If you look at a flat map, marking the two points Cape of Good Hope and Houston, the route we take looks strangely out of the way. Perhaps it is the curvature of the earth or the desire to not be far from land that designs our route.

(Shari) All of us but Randy, Byron, and Janet are on the same plane from Cape Town to Doha. Here we have an eight hour layover. Ugh! Doha is a wonderful clean modern airport and has been voted one of the best in the world. Bert makes my day when the customs officer asks us the secret to 50 years of marriage. He tells him "Make the right choice the first time." That

statement keeps me going all day. We easily find our next boarding gate and settle down on chairs for a bit of Internet use. Then we go to the restaurant for a beer and a sandwich.

(Bert) Without a stop we cross the African continent lengthwise though above the Indian Ocean and following the coast to the Persian Gulf. We cross two time zones to the east, but then come back one time zone. All of us are on the same flight, but we part ways at Doha with most heading to New York and ours to Miami. I'm surprised how active the airport is in the middle of the night with open shops still at midnight. Shari and I have a beer and snack at a restaurant enclave, idling away the time. I use my computer until the battery depletes. I continue reading a book I started yesterday. We catnap on the uncomfortable chairs.

At about 6 AM the airport staff members are preparing the gate. I'm most interested in how they will handle my computer and camera equipment with the new U.S. regulations prohibiting them as carry-on from Middle East airports such as Doha. The staff stack cardboard boxes, assemble packing tape dispensers, and prepare labels. My backpack is too large to fit in a cardboard box so they wire shut the pull zippers, put the backpack in a large clear bag, wire shut the bag with a zip tie, add an identification tag and a first class label (even though we are flying coach), and tell me they will carry it onto the plane. I am to pick it up in Miami at a special location for electronic equipment. At 7 AM we again pass through security which nowadays involves unloading everything I carry, even paper, and of course belt, wallet, keys, loose change, hat, and shoes and then proceeding to an enclosed x-ray machine where I stand with arms raised. Finally, at 8 AM our flight departs.

Qatar Airways uses comfortable planes for international travel, at least comfortable by today's unpleasant standards. And they serve lots of meals and even free alcoholic beverages. While our trans-Africa flight was crowded with every seat taken, our trans-Atlantic flight is less so and Shari and I share three seats over the wing. On the screens mounted on backs of each seat I can follow the flight's route and take a series of photo documentation, tracing us over Baghdad, flying close to Tehran, over the Caspian Sea, and then north of the Black Sea.



Flying between Caspian Sea and Black Sea

(Bert) About noon, we are flying near Kiev, following a path between Warsaw and Helsinki. Shari is in the window seat, but even if I were there I could not see below because the view is blocked by the wing. So, I move to the back of the plane and find a window from which to take photos. We are now flying over the coastline of the Baltic Sea in what is now Poland. My ancestors left this area in 1839 when it was then Pomerania, a Prussian state. I take lots of

photos and some videos, studying the geography and trying to match it with what I remember from maps of Pomerania. The land is very flat, mostly farmlands, a few patches of woods, and lots of non-parallel interlocking roads. Except for its flatness, it resembles the farmlands carved from the forests of southern Wisconsin where my great great grandparents settled north of Milwaukee.



Approaching the Baltic Sea



Farmlands of Poland, once Pomerania on the Baltic Sea



Flying over Gotland Island in the Baltic Sea

(Bert) By 4 PM Cape Town time, 30 hours since we left the hotel, we have passed Northern Europe and are now just south of Reykjavik, Iceland, with 3497 mi. left to reach Miami. Two

hours later we are passing over St. John's, Newfoundland, and then soon Halifax, Nova Scotia. My last in-flight photo is at 9:22 PM Cape Town time as we fly over the Bahamas.



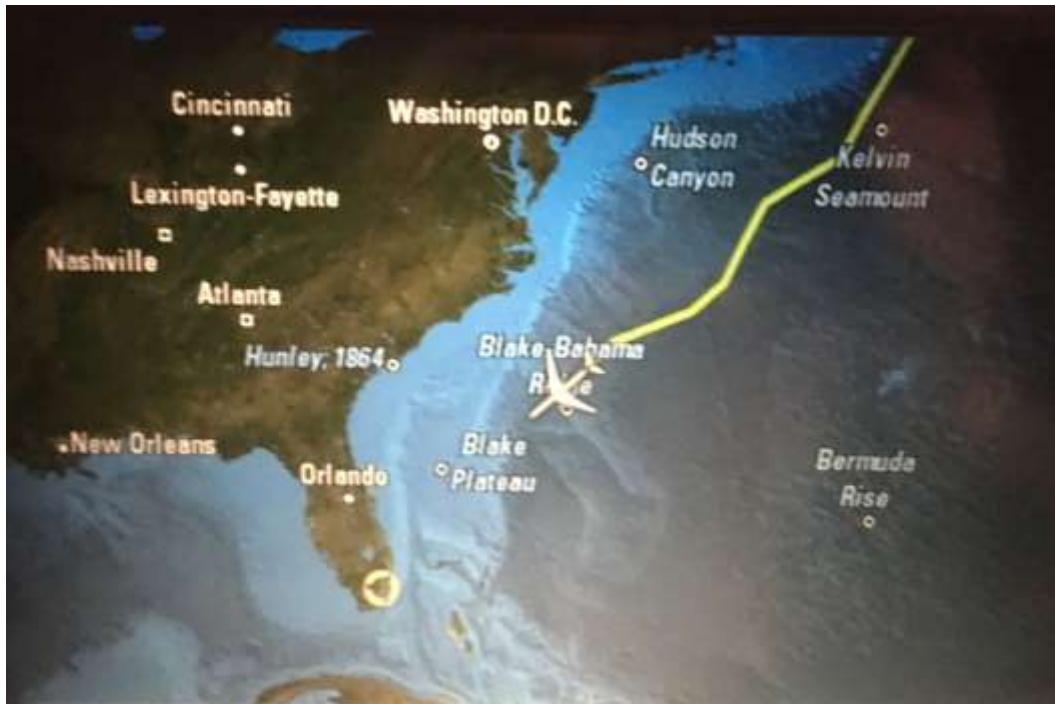
Flying south of Greenland



Captain's view of approach to Newfoundland



Passing Nova Scotia



Over the Bahamas

(Shari) The eight hours at the Doha airport go surprisingly fast and it's off to our next 15 hour flight to Miami. I watch four movies, eat three meals, and sleep four hours. Arriving in Miami a good 2 3/4 hours before our next flight, we still are unable to make the cut off. It seems we walk miles and miles and miles to reach our next gate. The airport is confusing and big. We never



make a wrong turn but at times we have to study what direction we're supposed to walk. At one point there are two automated machines with a sign that says they are for easy pass entry. I am unsure whether we should stop here or not. We do and it is a good decision as later dozens of machines are in use with long lines by each one. My printed easy pass entry has a red X on it and Bert's does not. I am told to go to another line and wait for a custom agent. Finally upon arriving he passes me through saying that the machines are acting up. We walk another seemingly two miles past every airline but United. United is the last one, of course. I had told Bert earlier to keep going as I could not walk faster. When I arrive Bert tells me we missed the cutoff for boarding by 5 min. At first the agent was snotty but turned out helpful in the end. She gave us hotel information and suggested we go back to Qatar Airways and ask them for a hotel room. Of course the Qatar agent has no sympathy and says their agreement with United was cancelled a few days ago, so we book a room on our own and wait outside for 20 min. for the shuttle. We check in, I shower, and go to bed for my 5 hr. beauty rest. Our flight to Houston leaves at 6 AM but we have to take the 4 AM shuttle to get there. Ugh!

(Bert) Our flight lands in Miami on time and we have nearly three hours to reach our connecting flight to Houston. We hustle through the gauntlet of passport check, security check, baggage pickup (they could not transport baggage beyond our first U.S. entry point), electronics secure baggage pickup, and head toward the United Airlines counter. I know the gauntlet took a lot of time so I push the baggage cart at a run while Shari walks more slowly far behind me. I reach the check-in counter and the lady looks at my luggage and says I am too late even though it is 45 min. before departure. Because of the delays in security checks, she tells me the new airline recommendations are 3 hr. ahead of departure for international travel. Our connecting flight was the last available and we will have to wait until tomorrow. Rather than sleep another night in an airport, we take the shuttle to a nearby hotel for five hours of rest before we leave again on the 4 AM shuttle back to the airport.

Over a hundred people are ahead of us at baggage drop-off but this time we will make the connection. Our flight to Houston is uneventful and we arrive early enough to take the first, rather than the second, flight to McAllen. However, the ticket agent tells us we must travel with our checked luggage and therefore cannot take the early flight. We wait another 3 hr. in the Houston airport before boarding. When we arrive in McAllen we cannot find our luggage at baggage claim. I walk into the office to report missing luggage and see our two bags on the floor. The attendant tells me they came in on the earlier flight. Go figure!

When we finally reach home it is Sunday afternoon local time. We have been traveling home since Friday morning for 2 days and 8 hours, taking 4 flights. I have read one book completely, watched six full-length movies, and taken numerous naps. It's good to be home!



Home sweet home! I think the palm trees grew while we were away.

## Epilogue

(Bert) Our Southern Africa trip was so great Shari and I want to do it again, probably in 2019. If you are interested in joining us on one of our tours, let us know and we will keep you informed.

(Shari) Well, we are home now after 56 hours of travel from Cape Town. The trip was a great one and I want to list all the misconceptions I had about it.

1. I'd be bored on a cruise. NOT true. There was more to do than I wanted to do. I did not even have time to finish one book. It was restful and still had lots to keep me occupied. I was happy that we did not have a port to visit every day as port visits were tiring.
2. I would not be able to ride a Segway. NOT true. It was easier than learning to ride a bike. It took about 5 min. to learn to balance
3. Our ports would not be interesting. Believe this or not, Bermuda was the least interesting port. All it had to offer was beaches. Malaga, Portugal and Funchal, Spain were gorgeous. Great vistas, shops, and tapas restaurants. And in Barcelona we had too few days. There certainly is more to visit there.
4. South Africa would be Third World with only the game animals to see. NOT true. It is a varied and beautiful country with beach, grassland, forest, farm, and mountain topography. It is more developed than Mexico or Central America with better roads and services. Plus it has the advantage of English.
5. I thought I'd only see the animals at a distance much like seeing a grizzly in Alaska on a hillside. NOT true. In fact, we got too close at times. At one time I could have reached out to touch an elephant.
6. I thought our hotel accommodations would be similar to a nice hotel in the U.S. NOT true. They were much better and often 5 star.
7. I don't know what I thought the food would be like but Kadu, crocodile, and ostrich certainly are unique and delicious.
8. After visiting Kruger National Park, I thought Botswana would be boring. NOT again. We saw the same animals but in a different setting. Unique elephants taking a bath and hippos up close..
9. Cape Town would be just a boring scary city. NOT true. The area had plenty for us to do for four days and was extremely beautiful.
10. South Africa itself would be scary much like traveling through an inner city in U.S. NOT true. I never was scared even once and always felt very safe.
11. The airline back would be bad. TRUE. Even worse than I had expected. But for the above 10 reasons, I'd suffer it again.