

A Camdenian in Africa -December 2012

First our thanks to all those who have sent us **Xmas greetings**.

They decorate our lounge in various ways.

I have to say that those who used the medium of the internet did provide a challenge for us. But some heavy duty brackets and an old rail sleeper are now over the fireplace together with a few computer screens in order to display the e mail cards!!(just kidding, of course the railway sleeper would be too heavy. We used an ordinary plank!)-thanks for these great cards.

We did a little bit of **travelling** again.

In fact the news we get back from around the world tends to include travel as a key ingredient. Some of the journeys are really quite super and thus our own trips may seem slightly dull by comparison. But never the less here we go.

This provides opportunity for first picture.

But before this I must mention that Melanie/Alex and Mackenzie decided to come to SA for a Xmas summer break.

They were booked on One Time for the Jhb./PE leg but One Time airline went bust just before they got here and thus they ended up driving down. To make the 1100 km journey to PE more pleasant they had booked a 6 sleeper cottage on a farm near **Nieu Bethesda**. We drove up some 250kms and met them there for 2 nights.

The semi desert Karoo is a special place but not attractive to all.

A few hours hike to the river and canyon took in the lovely scenery and this sheep stud farm was also a research area for fossils (Permian period) and cave paintings and more.

Now the pictures.



Here we have Melanie and Bev near the canyon and the other shows Alex, Mackenzie and Courtney looking on as Bev navigates a locked gate.

The journey also took us to The Owl House at Nieu Bethesda.

Helen Martins was born here in 1898 and returned in her 50's with a focused determination to transform the house and garden in a most remarkable manner using glass fragments and concrete statues that she and her helpers composed over some 25 years.

Graaf Reinet (Jewel of the Karoo) retains its wonderful charm and history of a Victorian era with lovely Cape Dutch style architecture and the near by Valley of Desolation in the Camdeboo National Park is the result of 100 million years of volcanic and erosive forces.

The dramatic rock formations and great views of the Karoo reach out behind Mackenzie and Courtney.



The garden of the Owl House.



A change of subject now although I will tell you about the Drakensberg and The Ride A Cup III shortly.

Some **social/economic/political news from SA.**

Our life expectancy has gone up to about 60 due in part to the wide distribution of ARV's that extends the lives of AIDS sufferers.

Unfortunately the number of people contracting HIV has not dropped which defies logic and common sense and must anger donors of AIDS funds.

Jacob Zuma is reported to have had house (palace) extensions on his private dwelling that costs some R250 million. When asked where the money came from and how much it actually cost he went very vague and did not seem to know what was happening to his own house and who was paying for it!! Well the feeling is that the tax payer is. An investigation is on the way.

The ANC have held their **party elections** for the next 5 year period and JZ is in again but Motlanthe as deputy is out. Business man Cyril Ramaphosa is now Deputy President of the ANC although curiously that does not automatically mean that he is Deputy President of the country. Perhaps Motlanthe will resign? If so that gives Ramaphosa the opportunity to show what he has to offer and, if successful, be in line to take over in the 2014 elections. We hang onto this positive note.

But...if Ramaphosa is good and honest as he seems to be, then how will he manage to work with the top ranks of the ANC? We will all watch with great interest.

The **JSE** has now gone through 40000 to be at an all time high. The Rand dropped to about 14:£1 but has since strengthened a little to around 13.8. So a weak currency but bubbling stock exchange! I guess people don't mind the politics as long as they can make money. Of course the interest rate at around 5% is at its` lowest level since the early `70`s which also drives funds into equities.

About 600 **rhinos** have been killed for their horns this year in SA. I am beginning to think that the answer lies in making the trade legal and farming rhinos for their horn rather like sheep for wool. The price would drop, crime would fall away and the rhino stocks would grow. Can anyone think of reasons why this could not work? By the way we also killed about 14000 people on our roads.

GDP growth now about 2.3 and dropping as political and infrastructure uncertainties put a brake on investments and particularly in mining where talk of nationalisation drives funding to other parts of the world.

Fracking is a big topic as the wonderful Karoo is the target area. Electricity prices here have gone through the roof and we need a low cost fuel source. I get the feeling that the greens will lose out on this one, but let us see.

Ok, enough of this boring stuff. "Let`s have another picture" I hear you say.

So here we are in **The Drakensberg mountains**



where we spent a week playing the **Ride A Cup III** and generally taking in the wonderful mountains.

Pictured are Brian from CT and me, on the left, and Stephen (in blue) from PE.

It was a great week of sport and walking with splendid weather, drinking and eating. We played 6 rounds in all with 2 of them at the Walmer Golf Club in PE.



The next picture shows Bev on a walk by the river.

We were at the Drakensberg Garden Hotel site near Underberg.

The trip took us through the old Ciskei and Transkei areas and we also diverted the return trip to **Southbroom** in KZN for a visit to our old friends Gill and Graham. They moved into their new coastal retreat about 2 weeks earlier.

Road works also made us look at using the tarred roads via **Port St. Johns** and we were shocked at the state of this once wonderful beauty spot. Give it a miss for a few years until some order and return of first world standards has taken place.

The Soccer World Cup 2010. We spent billions on road improvements in Jhb and also spent more millions on an Integrated Rapid Transport system in PE.

The road modifications were built in Jhb. but the toll road booths were only finished a year or so ago as the way of now actually paying for the roads. Court action and massed marches have delayed the process and we now await the final decisions and toll fees early in 2013. Busy car users will pay up to R500 per month for the pleasure of using these wider roads.

The PE IRTS was not used for the World Cup although buses for them were bought. We host the AFCON Cup in Jan 2013 and another lot of money has been spent on giving it another go. They have no bus stations and the routes seem to miss all the key spots. We wait to see it in operation although none are scheduled to come our way.

Talking transport. We have new Mandela notes but the Gautrain in Jhb did not respond and the ticket machines rejected the new sized notes until the media pressed the alarm buttons.

Fracking and crude oil and all that. The Middle East has risen in power due to Oil and we know how that has affected politics/religion and a new wave of terrorism around the globe.

If Fracking takes over as the new low cost fuel source as it seems to be doing in the USA then one can start to speculate how the global dynamics may change. The next 20 years will be an interesting chapter in our Earth History book. SA appears to have vast areas of natural gas that can be extracted by Fracking (studies under way to confirm this). To be self sufficient in fuel has to be a major reason to place environmental issues at a lower level. Only in this one instance of course!!

It is now Dec 21 and it is a lovely day in the high 20's C. We have just had our December Breakfast Club "meeting" at the Blue Skies and we enjoyed a great Braai at Di and Stewart's the other day with some very interesting people about which I could write a lot.

The page end is close by and so it is left for us to say "merry Christmas" and may 2013 be good to you all in whatever way matters most to you.

Love

Bev and Alan