

An Old Camdenian in Africa

Feb 2012

As I input this I have near me the music of the Fureys that is a reminder that as much as things change they also remain the same.

At the southern tip of South Africa we look north over the Limpopo and then the Zambezi and on across the Sahara to those places nestling up against the Mediterranean and gain some sense of perspective about our life in Africa.

A free press, democracy, independent judiciary and bloodless transition from Apartheid make fine contrasts to those caught up in the Arab Spring that hurtles these “frozen” countries into the fluid challenges of the 21st Century.

Their journey has just begun.

Then let us continue on across the Med to Europe that sees the big divide between the organised north and the laid back less disciplined south. We have billions of Rands to spend on infrastructure here and have a debt to GDP ratio of around 36% that would be the envy of most Euro nations.

I listen and watch the debates and gain some sense about the intellectual quality of the prime movers in these matters and feel quite envious of the palpable qualities on display.

You may laugh at this but then we are comparing against our local batch of “thieves” that disgrace the voter and the principles of the ANC.

I have no doubt that Europe will move forward but am not so sure about Africa. We see our possible future played out in Zimbabwe and shut our eyes and hope.

Queen is now playing.

So onto something else.

Something with a picture perhaps.

The annual Camdenian Dinner and Golf competition.

Well we could not make it to the UK this time but managed our own small version here in sunny SA.

Yes folks three Camdenians got together in Nov 2011 and had a fine dinner and much golf was also played.



Barry Seller (middle) flew in from Johannesburg, 1100 kms, and Brian Seller (left) drove up from Cape Town, 800kms, to do battle over 7 days at the lovely Gary Player course at The Fish River Sun.

You might note the blue skies and the lure of the Indian Ocean in the background.

A pic of the pool area gives a different aspect of this hotel/Timeshare site.

We raised a glass and gave a toast to the Old C`s.



As you must know this part of South Africa was the arrival place of 21 ships bringing the 1820 British Settlers to Algoa Bay. Both Port Elizabeth and the surrounding towns have many reminders of this time and the culture and architecture that went with it. It is a challenge in the new South Africa to

convince the ANC that there is merit in retaining this important part of our local history. Especially as the Frontier wars had the British in combat with the local Xhosa people.

Never the less we made it to the oldest serving Inn in South Africa being The Pig and Whistle in Bathurst. This has been in operation since about 1832. It took us through the pineapple growing area close to Port Alfred.

In Jan around 1879 about 1000 British Red Coats and others were routed by the 20,000 strong Zulu forces at the Battle of Isandlwana. A short while later the heroic defence of Rorkes Drift saw the Red Coats lose 17 to the 500 of Zulu warriors that perished on that day. Their anniversaries were noted as we start this new year.



We have the second tallest flag pole in Africa! Not exactly one of the great wonders of the world but it is here in little old Port Elizabeth. I think it was planned for the World Cup but that was in 2010. So we missed that one. The old lighthouse and pyramid dedicated to Lady Elizabeth Donkin (hence Port Elizabeth) gives visitors a fine panoramic view over the harbour and city.

The area gives way to steep steps that takes one from the Donkin into the older centre of PE in which stands the lovely 19th Century library that still operates with wonderful walkways around the main library rooms. Outside stands a fine statue of Queen Victoria that has been the centre of much debate by the local ANC people. But the linking up of this and the old St Marys Church and Feathermarket Hall has provided a focal point for tourists and the money that the City derives from tourism may just be enough to see these old British landmarks stay in place for the foreseeable future.

A few steps away is the Opera House that remains the oldest theatre in South Africa but it was to the Little Theatre, not far off, that we went for another of those remains of British culture. I refer to the annual Pantomime and in this case the much played out Jack and The Beanstalk. Great fun especially for our 10 year old granddaughter.

We have a new Rugby coach for the Springboks.

He hails from the Blue Bulls and seems to be just the sort of guy needed to put SA back on top and replace the much praised NZ side. England must watch out in the forthcoming tour as SA players will be out to impress the new manager.

That is the good news.

The bad stuff is all about poor sports administration, and dodgy payments to people. This covers most of the sports bodies in SA who are jumping on the government led band wagon of self gratification at all costs.

Our granddaughter, Courtney attends a normal government school that used to be for white only children. This all changed back in the 90s but they are still referred to as Model C schools as they were the first to go multinational and open to all races.



They are the last few schools that provide an excellent education but now this comes at a price as high school fees need to be paid to maintain standards.

This pic is indicative of the all round education provided and shows a small section of the band and her doing her best with a euphonium.

The future of the nation lies in the stock of educated citizens being produced by the education system but despite enormous financial resources the outcomes remain unacceptable.

It is a symptom of the bigger issue of state competency to run the country and as each day goes by there is more and more awareness of the terrible mess that the ANC has got the country into. We have the opportunity to turn it around. Time will show if this happens.

I will close at this point as I see the bottom of the page fast approaching.

We already have plans for 2012 with a trip to the UK in Aug/Sept (last there in 2008) and the next SA Old Camdenian Golf tournament/dinner in November. This will be played out at the wonderful Glencarry Country Club that sits below the mighty peaks of the Drakensberg Mountains that provide the boundary for this side of Lesotho in Kwazulu Natal.

But more about all this later in the year.

Bye for now and all the best for Europe and the UK in 2012.

Alan Shearn