

Wednesday August 17 Cape Town to Johannesburg to Kruger National Park

Up at 5:45, ate, finished packing and were picked up promptly by the driver Carole arranged for us. No problem getting standby to Johannesburg. Called Jim and left a message with Cynthia. Jim picked us up and we headed to Kruger. READ provided Jim with a car and a gasoline card. We stopped for lunch at a Denny like fast food place about 1:30. We're on a high plateau called the high veld. As we got farther along we saw fields of alfalfa, cabbages and cattle. Closer to Kruger we saw oranges, avocados, papayas. There were deep canyons, waterfalls, mountains behind mountains in hazy grays. We began to see the electrified fences which meant we were near Kruger National Park.



We arrived at Leopard's View. This is a compound with three houses that sleeps six people. The proprietor, named Jann, is somewhat taciturn but became quickly loquacious. He has run this place for about 5 years. It is beautifully decorated with African masks, fans, wooden sculptures, etc. It has wonderful succulents and cactus – Euphorbia.

We had a wonderful dinner starting with black mushrooms on toast, the steak and potatoes and cantaloupe balls in liquor. Everything was presented beautifully. We talked about South African and U.S. politics. Jann blames everything on Bush including the over population of elephants in the reserve. He doesn't like Americans much, thinks we should feel guilty about Iraq like white south Africans felt guilty during apartheid. He talked a lot.

We stayed up with Jim til about 10:30.

Thursday, August 18, Kruger National Park

We woke up about 6:30. No hot water. Jim was looking through binocs and saw giraffes at the pond below the outside dinning area where we could view things from. Lots of birds, silence and quiet. It is relaxing and beautiful. Jann served a very full breakfast.

We packed up and headed for Kruger. We came to the Orden Gate to enter Kruger National Park. It has been a game reserve since the beginning of the 20th century and is a park of about 20,000 km or about 7500 miles and the largest park in South Africa. It has rustic facilities as well as lodges and luxury lodges. There are all kinds of wilderness trails and trips around the park. We spent most of the day following various roads through the park mostly moving south toward Swaziland. We will stay at Skukuzu for two nights and a third night at the most southern lodge. We started our trip from Orden around 10:30 and traveled to about 3:00 when we arrived at Skukuzu.



The flora is dull brown and yellow like a dry savannah veld. Trees, shrubs and grasses form the landscape. Many trees are splintered and broken as a result of the work of the elephants. We saw elephants, lots of giraffes, zebras, various primates, various antelopes, diverse birds, etc. Jim shared his knowledge about the park and many of the animals that he has learned about over his many trips to the park.

When we got to the camp area, we signed in, got our cabin which smelled from insecticide. The room is small, a double bed, some chairs and bathroom with shower. The cabins are round with African thatched roofs. Kitchen and eating area are outside. We looked around the store and eating areas and decided to have a buffet dinner in the restaurant. The store has prepared food and food to be prepared and life's necessities. It also has a gift shop with Kruger National Park items and other African craft gifts. We were all very tired and went back to our cabins early.



Downloaded pictures, wrote in the diary, watched some t.v. and retired. Jim has been wonderful on this trip. He's helpful and we talk a lot about reading, IRA, African education and politics and U.S. politics.

Friday, August 19, Kruger National Park

Jim was at our door at about 7:00. Ken was up, finished dressing quickly and went with Jim to get food for breakfast, lunch and snacks. Yetta was ready when they got back. We decided on a route and we spent the day following dirt and paved roads hoping to view animals. We went through a number of ecological zones. One was open plains with sweet grasses. Some areas were wooded with short trees. The colors are brown and yellow for the most part. Trees and shrubs are being destroyed by elephants. There were beautiful water holes and some had places where we could sit and relax and watch for animals. We were especially impressed with one blind where we watched hippos and birds and it was so peaceful. For the most part we watched the animals through the car's closed windows. The elephants trumpet and wave their ears and you think they are coming straight for the car.



Jim thinks their bark is worse than their bite. Ken's not too sure. The baboons are more placid here than at Cape Hope but in some of the shopping areas there are signs saying not to feed the baboons and vervet monkeys because they become aggressive and have to be shot. We ate our food as we were driving. We stopped at a few places for drinks and to stretch our legs.



We got back to Skukuza about 5:40. It is necessary to be in a settled camp or out of the park at this specified time or it is possible to get a stiff fine. We had buffet dinner at the lodge. We made reservations to go on a twilight ride at Bergendal where we will stay tomorrow night. We ate dinner at the restaurant again. We saw a tragic film about the predatory and survival nature of hyenas, wild dogs and elephants. It seemed to show the realistic but violent side of nature. We came back to our hut. Started to pack, Ken checked his photos, Yetta tried to set up a plan for trips for tomorrow. Watched t.v. (Golf) for a bit and went to bed.

Saturday, August 20, Kruger National Park



We got ready for our trip to Bergendal We got the car loaded and headed out about 8:30., stopping at the store on the way out to get coffee and some food for the day. We spent the day in a similar manner to yesterday taking dirt and paved roads to see the animals in the wild going more or less toward Bergendal. We saw lions on a distant rock and other animals listed below. We arrived at Bergendal about 3:00. We had a cabin that slept six people that was fully equipped with cooking utensils and air

conditioning. We got to the tour vehicle and Jim went with us on a night safari from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. The vehicle has open sides and is relatively high to provide good vision. Powerful stationary lights go on when it gets fully dark and some passengers are given powerful hand head lights to scan the bush and trees to see the animals

. A mother and son sitting behind us were pretty good at spotting in the scanning lights. They spotted a white tailed mongoose, owls and a very scared scrub hare. The most specular sight was a family of hyenas including lactating mothers and two babies. We also saw a genet which is a nocturnal cat not usually seen.



When we got back to the lodge we had buffet dinner again served in a similar way to the previous nights but including buffalo stew and roast impala which tasted pork like. We talked with Jim and had something to drink. Ken edited pictures. Jim worked on his presentation for the Pan African conference..



Sunday, August 21, Kruger National Park to Swaziland

Ken was up at 5:45. We were out of the cabin at 7:15. We drove off and ate some of the food from the day before. Stopped on the way for coffee and a light breakfast. Ken had an Afrikaner pancake that was much like his crepes. Like yesterday Yetta drove for a few hours on the left side of the road We again traveled among dirt and paved roads

hoping to see a lion, leopard or cheetah but we were not successful. We did seem wildebeests and other animals we've seen before and interesting birds.



.During our time in Kruger and on our way to Kruger we saw the following animals:

a number of wart hogs, kudu – males are spectacular and not easily visible; crocodiles; white rhinos; wildebeest/gnus; many many Chacma baboons, vervet monkeys, impala, zebra, hippos, Cape buffalo; elephants, giraffes, a pair of duikur, a klipspringer, Cape buffalo black rhinos, hyenas (one during the night), water bucks, bushbuck, water monitor, steenbok; white tale mongoose, small spotted genet,

We also saw the following birds. We are less sure of the birds because we don't have a good bird book. A question mark indicates we were not sure of the name.

laughing Doves, crested francolin, secretary bird, fish eagle, saddle billed stork, helmeted guinea fowl, cape glossy starling, ground horn bill, yellow horn bill, red horn bill, owls, lilac breasted rollers, bats, chinspot batis, black and white magpie like bird with a long tail; Egyptian goose, woodland kingfisher, vultures, white breasted cormorant, Egyptian ibis

We saw lots of flowers and cactus and trees. We saw a baobab tree, impala lilies, succulents, cactus, umbrella trees, and many more.

General impressions to Kruger

This is a very well maintained national park. The facilities are not imitative but each is clean and very accommodating. There are activities at each camp ground that are somewhat different from one camp to another. The roads are well maintained but kept rustic to support the natural bio systems of the plants, birds and animals. Only main roads are paved. Park rules are that you may not leave your car except in specially designated places. One remarkable thing is that the animals seem to treat cars as part of the natural environment as long as there is no unusual movements like hanging out of windows and opening doors. Driving around to spot animals is curiously relaxing. Just when you think you're lucky because you saw a distant rhinoceros, a group of them walk calmly across the road in front of the car. Another interesting phenomenon we became aware of is that due to conservationist policy there is a huge over population of elephants and during the dry season when sweet grasses are not abundant, the elephants reek havoc with the trees knocking them down, stripping the bark and uprooting them to get at the roots.. Herds of impala are everywhere and serve as the main food source for the carnivores.

The thing we found amusing is that the South Africans blame this policy on George Bush. In fact they blame everything wrong in the world on G. Bush

Leaving Kruger

We headed back to one of the southern gates and left Kruger about 12:00 noon for Swaziland. We went through customs for South Africa and then into Swaziland without any problems and quite quickly. Swaziland is mountainous with generally good roads. It seems poorer throughout than South Africa but there is construction, farming and hectares and hectares of tree farms growing wood. There were timber mills along the way. We saw mango trees and citrus as well.