

GT - August 2023 Trip to South Africa

Background Louise went to SA in July 1969 - I arrived on January 1st 1970. She passed away in December 2018. As a memorial I had 2 plaques made which connected her with the place of her birth (Wales) & SA where we spent 16 happy years. One plaque is in our garden - the other one was to be placed in the garden of our former neighbour Antoinette (Toni). The main thrust of the visit was to position the 2nd plaque.

Thursday August 3rd - I flew from Leeds/Bradford to Amsterdam and then on to Johannesburg. From Amsterdam I sat next to an attractive 40- year-old woman called Claire & her 4-year- old son. She and her family were in the process of emigrating from SA to Holland.

The plane had been an hour late leaving Amsterdam, so we only arrived at JHB close to midnight. Toni & her husband Deon greeted me. Within 2 minutes she said, "You have to be up at 09:30 this morning because we are going to drive 450 km to visit friends so you will have to go to sleep at 100mph!". Welcome to SA!

Toni & Deon live in a place called LETAMO Game Farm, ([Letamo Game Farm](#)) situated in the area of KROMDRAAI which in turn lies within the Cradle of Humankind. Also, the STERKFORTEIN CAVES lie within this area.





Friday August 4th

We set off mid-morning to drive to the weekend/second home of Pieter & Christa not too far from the town of ALLDAYS in Limpopo Province. We stopped at a roadside service eatery called MAXI'S with tasty food (and spotlessly clean rest rooms). Pieter owns an electrical engineering company, and their property lies either side of the Sand River. We had arrived ahead of P&C and Deon immediately set about making a braai. Slept that night in the bottom bunk in a room containing 8 bunk beds.

Saturday August 5th

Deon & I went for a game drive (all within Pieter's land which apparently is 250 hectares in size) with Pieter and 2 African workers. The vehicle of choice for driving long distances seems to be Toyota Hilux. Over the years Pieter had laid down all the tracks himself so took us in a series of (to me) bewildering directions. We saw plenty of buck e.g. Impala, Kudo etc. Also, Louise's favourite - Guinea fowl. We had lunch, prepared by Pieter, under a huge lapa. An endearing feature is that before the meal we all held hands, and someone said grace.

Sunday August 6th

Pieter took 2 African workers with him and shot a buck solely for their own use with a telescopic rifle. The buck was processed on-site

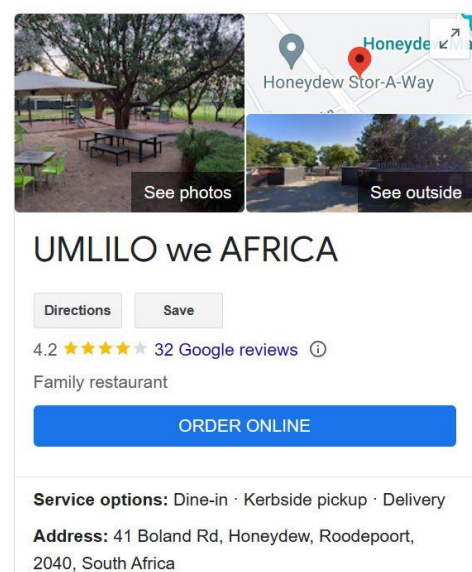
and hung to mature. Also, the Africans were helping to repair a component from a pump station from the Sand Riverbank.

Deon is a prominent Mining Engineer working for Murray & Roberts currently employed at a major mine in Limpopo Province. It transpires that he once employed Cyril Ramaphosa - current SA President.

We then drove back to LETAMO stopping on the way for some refreshment.

Monday August 7th

Visited (the former) ALVIDA 52 years to the day and almost to the hour since Louise & I married there. It is now a restaurant/bar called UMLILO we AFRICA SHISANYAMA. A Web Link is shown below:



[UMLILO we AFRICA restaurant, Roodepoort - Restaurant reviews \(restaurantguru.com\)](https://restaurantguru.com/UMLILO-we-AFRICA-Roodepoort)

What our little ALVIDA has been transformed into! If you type in UMLILO we AFRICA you will see the above picture. If you click on one of the images you can take a 'tour' around the place. Inside we felt that the fireplace was still original.

Toni suggested we had a drink to celebrate the occasion - we each had a shot of Amarula liqueur, We all signed the receipt which I have in my hand whilst writing this account. It was quite an emotional time for me.

When we got back to Letamo we had a small 'ceremony' for me to place the 'Louise plaque' in one of Toni's pots. Toni had acquired a cutting of a frangipani plant from the Oyster Box Hotel at Umhlamga. It is planted in a tall 'Ali-Baba' type of ceramic container.



The stake on the plaque will be replaced with a longer one so it stands better.

Tuesday August 8th

Spent the whole day relaxing in the garden mainly reading. In the morning, as I arose, a herd of springbok appeared just outside the bedroom window!

Wednesday August 9th

Toni's cousin Amanda had suffered a stroke so I went with Toni so she could visit her at the OLIVEDALE Hospital in Randburg. This is a private hospital run by the Netcare Group. Very clean & modern with ample, free parking! I stayed in the cafeteria observing the comings and goings. Fully multi-racial - newly born children being wheeled to

the entrance in mobile cribs prior to going home: elderly couples, one pushing the other in wheelchairs: black porters conveying infirm patients in and out. Had lunch with (one of) Amanda's daughters and her husband. She has run 10 Comrade's Ultra marathons!.

(When we left SA in January 1986 Amanda had bought Louise's VW Golf).

Thursday August 10th

Visited our first home at Plot 40 STEYNSVLEI! (Toni was our neighbour there). We started taking some photos outside until 2 men appeared at the fence. When I explained my connection, they invited us inside to have a look around. To me this was a bit eerie! The kitchen door at the side was still the same as well as the French windows leading to the same slasto paving. A water tank was still in position on its stand although the 'dam' (which we had made into a crude swimming pool) was now defunct. As always, these days there was an electrified security fence around the property as well as a 'trip' wire in the garden!

Friday August 11th

Mostly 'at home'. Went for an ill thought-out dip in the pool - so cold!! In the afternoon we went to fetch De Wet (Jnr) from his school Monument High in Krugersdorp. So, refreshing to see all pupils smartly dressed with the boys' shirts firmly tucked into their trousers. De Wet will stay for the weekend. On the way home we stopped to order pizzas at IL Mio Pizzeria. Toni & I virtually collapsed with laughter at reading one of the menu items "IL VARKIE" (literally little pig) . The employees at the shop were totally bemused with our giggles!

Saturday August 12th

Toni took De Wet to 'extra' school classes. In the early evening DW took me for a game drive, in LETAMO, in Toni's BMW SUV. He is 16 so cannot yet drive on main roads but can drive off-road. He handled the car in a mature manner. We saw many animals including hippo, waterbuck, zebra, springbok, impala & wildebeest.

He told me of his plans for the future - he seems to have a good idea of what he wants to do. Joe Biden came on the TV. DW asked if I had met him! This developed into a bit of a 'game: 'Had I met the King?' Etc.)

Sunday August 13th

Toni took DW to the house of Andre (another of Toni's sons) where he stays in the week. We had had a delicious lamb lunch. In the evening watched the 1st episode of the TV series 'Indian Summers'.

Monday August 14th

Firstly, we went back to the OLIVEDALE Hospital. Then we went to the iconic steakhouse 'The THUNDERGUN' in Northcliff.

(www.thundergun.co.za) This opened in 1968 & I told the staff that I had been there in 1970. I had the most delicious, succulent, tender T-Bone with a few chips and onion rings. Toni had peri chicken. The whole bill including drinks and a tip came to R588.80. At R24.00 to the £ this equated to £24.50. The place has not really changed that much since we used to go there in the 70's & 80's. In 1968 a T-Bone cost R1.68!

This is the correct address but, on my machine, I received a message to the effect that the link might not be safe.



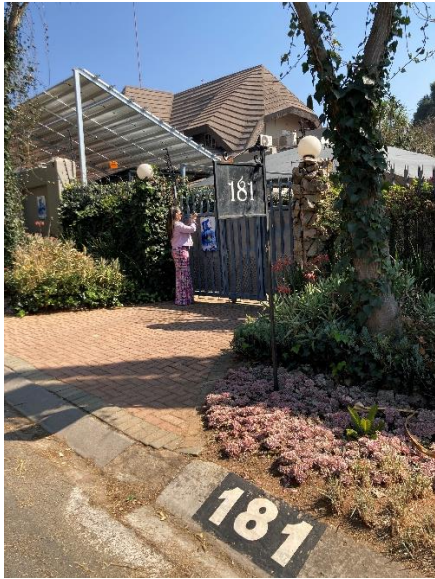
Thundergun

<https://www.thundergun.co.za> ⋮

Thundergun – Family Restaurant and Steakhouse

Tuesday August 15th

Visited our last home - 181 PRUIMBOS Avenue, WELTERVREDEN Park (WP). Obviously, it was now protected by a high security fence, but we immediately recognized it by the little bay window and the front door.



We also tried to find the house we had rented between leaving Plot 40 & living at 181 but we couldn't definitely identify it.

We then visited **Second Cup**, a recherche restaurant situated on a small holding in WP. We had food with mixed results.

[\(20+\) Facebook](#)

On the way home we stopped at the **Drift Inn, Muldersdrift**. I remember we used to go there quite often - how times change. At the entrance there is a sign saying "This is a rifle free area"!

[\(20+\) The Drift Country Inn | Facebook](#)

Opposite there is a large charity establishment, devoted to the care of animals, selling books and other items. At home Deon was back from a visit to the mine.

Wednesday August 16th

Went to lunch at a palatial spa resort called KLOOFZICHT which is not far from LETAMO

[Kloofzicht Lodge - Guvon Hotels and Spas](#)

Present were Toni's sister Catherine & her husband Gert, together with friends of Toni's - Flo & her husband Theo. As you can see there is a lake set in the foothills of the ZWARTKOPS Mountains.

Lunch was a comprehensive buffet. After the meal Deon & I took Catherine & Gert back to their homestead.

Thursday August 17th

One of Deon's past projects was to sink the escape shafts for the Johannesburg Underground rail network, The impetus for this venture was the awarding in 2004 by FIFA to SA of the 2010 Football World Cup. As can be seen there are not many stations within Johannesburg, but the lines do run to past Pretoria and to Oliver Tambo International Airport which is very useful.



We did a 'tour' of the Northern Suburbs and Deon showed me several of the shaft buildings which seemed to me to blend in with the immediate surroundings. In Houghton we passed many properties which would have shamed some of the better areas of London. Apparently, in the middle of the night, during the construction Deon received a phone call telling him that a portion of Oxford Street (a main thoroughfare in Rosebank) and collapsed into a sink hole. He

had to rectify this very quickly! We then went for a short return journey from Park Station to Marlboro. Very clean and functional.

As you can see my ticket is valid until 31/12/2027!

We then went back to LETAMO to collect Toni and went for supper to the **Rock Cod** restaurant www.rockcod.co.za I had a kingklip thermidor which was delicious.

Friday August 18th

Very first thing in the morning Andre, one of Toni's sons, appeared to say hello. Andre had stayed with us at Stutton in former times and he & Jeremy had had some adventures in the Tadcaster pubs. Andre is now in (gold) mining as well as being involved in the church as a deacon. He actually officiated at Toni & Deon's 'first' wedding.



Deon & Toni have 2 African servants - Sime who helps in the house and Diligence who is mainly the gardener. I gave them both some money for helping to look after me.

We then set off for a tour of the Anglo/Boer & Anglo/Zulu battlefields. Toni drove Deon's vehicle to a farm called SNEEZEWOOD (<https://www.sneezewood.co.za>) which is situated 5km from the town of Dundee - Kwa-Zulu Natal. We travelled via Van Reenen's Pass, again stopping for refreshment at a MUGG & BEAN eatery. This is chain of SA restaurants which serve good quality food at reasonable prices. We listened to Bill Bryson reading

extracts from his book "The Theory of almost Everything" and arrived at about 16:30. Deon immediately set to making a braai but only using special, hard wood - no charcoal! This type of wood is slow burning and retains its heat with minimal smoke. One of these woods is called **deurmekaarbos** which in English means 'confused/tangled bush'!

Saturday August 19th

Visited the **Blood River Battlefield** about 43km from Dundee. (www.bloodriver.co.za). This was fought on December 16th 1838 between about 500 Voortrekkers and 16,000 Zulus. Approximately 3,000 Zulus were killed with 3/4 Voortrekkers lightly wounded. The Voortrekkers laagered their wagons as shown in a huge circle forming an impregnable defence.



In 2016 Toni & her sister scattered the ashes of their mother standing on top of one of the wagons.

On the way back we stopped at the **Battle of Talana Hills Battlefield** in Dundee, (<https://www.talana.co.za>) fought on October 20th 1899. The British Forces suffered more deaths and casualties than the Voortrekkers.

Sunday August 20th

Travelled to Winterton for lunch with Toni's friend Estelle and her husband Lorenzo at the **Farmer's Fork**.



Estelle is an 'Intuitive Soul Coach' and gives classes via the Internet.

Bought a distinctive pot which is now on my landing window sill.

After lunch we (Toni, Deon & I) visited the **Battlefield of Spioenkop** near Ladysmith (<https://www.spionkop.co.za>) fought on January 24th 1900



Monday August 21st

Deon & I went with our professional guide **Pat Rundgren** to visit the battlefields of Isandlwana [Isandlwana Battlefield - Battlefields Route](#) & Rorke's Drift [Rorke's Drift is a KwaZulu-Natal Battlefield site and home to the ELC arts and crafts centre \(GL\) \(southafrica.net\)](#) Both battles were fought on the same day January 22nd 1879. In the morning, about 20,000 Zulus attacked the British camp leaving more than 1,300 dead. Although the Zulus also suffered many dead (between 1,000 & 3,000) this was the worst defeat for the British Army against an indigenous people.

The British Army largely consisted of the 1st & 2nd Battalions of the 24th Regiment of Foot.

The Queen's Colours of the 1st Battalion were rescued by Lieutenants Melvill & Coghill. The Zulus killed them, and Pat took us to their graves. It was a very steep ascent.



In the afternoon, about 4,000 Zulus marched to Rorke's Drift. This was defended by about 140 men including several sick. They successfully held off the Zulus with about 17 British soldiers killed & more than 800 Zulu casualties. 11 Victoria Crosses were awarded - the highest ever for a single incident. Whilst all these were

undoubtedly earned it was felt at the time that the number might have been influenced by the fact that the British Government & people needed to hear 'better' news after the debacle at Isandlwana.

CASH SALE

Date 21.08.2023

Supplied by Rorke's Drift Cafe & Tours

Address _____ V.A.T. Reg. No. _____

1	Cheese & Tomato Sandwich	R40	00
2	French Fries	R52	00
3	Drinks	R50	00
	Sub Total		
	V.A.T. @% / Inclusive (Delete as applicable)		
PAID	TOTAL	R142	00

Thank You - (Signature)

Pat told us that it is his 'holy grail' to find the Queen's Colours (or at least a remnant of them) for the 2nd Battalion 24th Regiment of Foot which had defended Rorke's Drift.

Tuesday August 22nd

In the morning I went for a walk around the Sneezewood farm during which I saw a snake in the newly mown grass, probably a mole snake.

In the afternoon we went back to TALANA. In addition to information about the battle itself there are copious displays about various other war-related activities including WW1. By the time we had some tea in the Miner's Rest we were 'musuemed out'.

Toni took a photo of me by the locomotive TALANA just as she had done with Louise in 2014:



Wednesday August 23rd

Drove back to LETAMO with Deon driving. We stopped at Montrose for refreshment.

Thursday August 24th

This was the day I left so spent some time packing. In the afternoon 3 schoolboys appeared. They were De Wet Jnr, Andre Jnr & Leo (another of Andre Snr sons). They were joshing around good-naturedly but looked smart in their school uniforms.

Toni had to go back to the OLIVEDALE Hospital again, so Deon drove me to the airport. Before she left she gave me some items of Shweshwe material to give to Harriet.

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Observations & Reflections

Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) - There are an astonishing number of HGVs on SA roads with 6, 7, & 8 axles being the norm. On the main highways they outnumber private vehicles. I am told that one of the reasons for the high number is the inefficiency of the SA Railways Freight infrastructure. Some of the trucks carry foreign number

plates: many from Zambia carrying copper products to Durban whence they are shipped to China for refining!

SA Roads & Potholes - Most of the (M)otorways & the (N)ational roads are pretty well maintained. However, once you encounter (R)egional roads and below you face the danger of potholes. These are caused by, amongst other factors, extreme weather conditions, poor maintenance, and a high number of load-bearing vehicles (HGVs). On some GPS systems the potholes are marked as 'features' and prompt the driver to confirm that the potholes are still in place! In some locations local farmers spread sand to make the holes more visible.

I had suggested that UK roads were much better. However, on w/c 18/09 I had cause to drive to Winchester in the South of England and I have had to revise my opinion. Whilst I don't think they ever appear on GPS systems the B & some of the 'lesser' A roads are in poor shape.

Load Shedding - ESKOM, the public utility electricity supplier has been unable to supply enough electricity for the whole of SA to use all at the same time! This has been caused by inefficiencies and corruption and has been the position for many years, Consequently, all the SA Provinces are broken down into areas and, via an app, schedules are provided displaying when power will be cut and for how long. Although I was not driving, I noticed that this caused major problems at road junctions when the traffic lights were not working, particularly at dusk time. Candles and torches have become essential items in the home!

Recycling - this seems to be something of an ad hoc activity. I observed that the different items of rubbish e.g., paper, glass etc. were not sorted in the house. Everything was placed in bin bags which were placed outside the property for collection.

However, there is an 'army' of (usually) black people who then extract from these bags the various articles and then take them to the actual recycling centre for payment. They do this by using what I can only describe as 'modified' super-market trolleys piled sometimes twice as high as the trolley itself and occasionally having a 'trailer'. To see them toiling up the hills is a sight indeed. Deon applauded their activities saying that it kept them out of crime and kept the areas tidy.

Minibuses - these (usually) 16-seater vehicles provide most of the transport for the non-white people. There are hundreds of thousands of them throughout the country. Some of the roads around Johannesburg have quite wide hard shoulders (which I am told might be used for future road expansion). These hard shoulders sometimes slope away from the tarmac and the minibuses usually wait there to pick up passengers.

Begging - In Houghton (JHB) I saw properties of unimaginable wealth. On the other hand, there is grinding poverty amongst the majority of the (non-white) population. People begging at major road intersections is common. One man to whom Toni did give some money held up a 'banner' saying "I'm ashamed to have to do this....." However, the person who stuck in my memory was a lady. She appeared to be white, small in stature, with snowy white hair and dressed in a garment which looked almost like an Indian sari. She just stood in the middle of the traffic staring ahead with her hands crossed down in front of her. She was not asking for any money, but she made a lasting impression.

Pets - Deon has 2 dachshunds. Jophie is smooth-haired, about 14 years old and spends most of the day either sleeping or pottering about. Cinnamon, shown below, is about 2, clever and with an inexhaustible supply of energy when chasing a rubber ball in a large garden.



However, she is also very naughty ripping apart any paperbacks which may, inadvertently, have been left within her range. Toni gave her a severe telling off after my novel had been 'altered'!

Overall - It was very important for me to make this journey/"pilgrimage" to 'round the circle' on Louise's behalf. You cannot live in a country for 16 years and not have some of its influences embedded in your DNA.

Toni has been a faithful friend for more than 50 years and she and Louise made a trip in 2014 to some of the battlefields we also went to.

To some it might seem there has been little change post-apartheid. The white people, largely, still have the position and the property and the black people provide the workforce. But these large establishments require constant maintenance and servicing and I observed there was now a more civil tone in conversation - more of a team spirit attitude.

The scenery is still, obviously, spectacular and the size is still awesome in the true sense of the word. As always it is a country of contrasts and, in spite of the load shedding and other problems, appears to work.

Alan Paton's book title "Cry, The Beloved Country" seems, somehow still apt.

Graham Thompson 14/10/2023