

## TRAVELOG

“This is your Captain speaking. We are now beginning our final descent into Cape Town International. For those of you seated on the right-hand side of the craft there is a great view of the city and Table Mountain.”

Naturally I was seated on the left-hand side. I got a great view of Cape Flats. As far as the eye could see high-density housing and industry with a hazy distant glimpse of the Hottentot Mountains.

Welcome to one of the worlds “most beautiful cities”!

I was warmly met by Helen and Simon and whisked along the freeway (this time getting a close up sighting of Table Mountain on my right-hand side) to their up market suburban home in Constantia. Constantia is Africa as I have never seen it. Trimmed, polished, European. Each house a mini fortress with electric fence, electric gate, electric garage door, high tech alarm system..... But definitely comfortable. A gushing hot shower pushed away the long haul cobwebs. A tasty Braai (BBQ), including Ostrich steak washed down with local wine (Constantia is surrounded by vine covered hills) and I began to feel at home.

Helen and Simon made it their ambition to show me as much of Cape Town and environs as possible in my short stay. Here are some snapshots:

Up over steeply wooded Constantia Nek into Hout Bay. A deep bay in a bowl of rugged mountains but so close to the city. The 2km of pure white sand beach was a joy to dog walk in the morning. Which is what most of the residents were doing. Being used to our East African dogs – brown, medium sized, non-descript curs – it was a revelation to meet an encyclopedia of the worlds dog breeds enjoying the surf. Equally intriguing was the municipal poop-scoop system in operation. On entering the beach zone the well behaved dog owner collects a small blue flag. When Bonzo decides to relieve himself you stick the flag in the sand beside the steaming pile so that the smartly uniformed “Poop Scoop Operator” knows where to look!

The Capes constantly changing weather made plans a little tricky. The day we did a tour down the Cape Peninsular started wet and dismal, so much so that Simonstown etc was viewed through thrashing wiper blades. But the afternoon cleared in time for the spectacular Chapmans Peak coast drive. I am a skeptic of attractions titled “The World’s most.....” “Chapmans Peak is labeled “The World’s most scenic drive”! It could well be fair to put it at the top end of the “scenic” spectrum. We stopped at a view point and Simon took an official “Ian has been to Cape Town “photo with the sea in the background. I was wearing a blue T shirt and for some reason posed with my hands behind my back. The end result when shown on the computer later was “Ian with no arms posing in Cape Town”!!!

On a stunningly clear and hot day we visited Herstenbosch Botanical gardens. Even an ardent plant hater or Arboreaphobic would love this place, with its backdrop of the Table Mountain and far reaching views across the city. And the plants are great too...

A perfect end to my few days was pizza in an upstairs restaurant on Camps Bay waterfront. Delicious Pizza, salad and wine in the gathering dusk as huge ocean rollers beat into the bay from the Southern Atlantic (if my geography is correct.)

Ready to begin the long haul back up this great continent from the southern tip to the equator. Huge thanks to Helen and Simon for their generous hospitality. Hopefully I will get the chance to revenge if they fulfill their dream to travel up through the interior in the next few years.

I chose to travel up the coast to Durban using BAZBUS. Although slightly more expensive than conventional buses this service provides hop-on hop-off door to door with all the major hostels. It is friendly, secure and convenient. My first stop off would be Knysna. This next part of the trip is truly holiday. I intend to enjoy it!!

About an hour out of Cape Town the road climbs an escarpment and you get the first impression of the immense size and space of this country. Seemingly endless ranchland, distant mountain peaks and occasional neat homesteads. A wild and exhilarating beauty. The smooth wide highways, free from potholes make for relaxing travel.

In the late afternoon I checked in to my comfortable room in 'Island Vibe' hostel in Knysna. It is neither an island nor especially 'vibey' but very central and welcoming. In the evening I took a stroll down to Knysna Keys to watch the sunset and grab some supper.

Knysna is a beautiful yachtsman paradise on the Garden Route. The quite posh town is based around the Keys, on the sheltered lagoon. An immensely relaxing spot to spend a couple of days. I used my time unwinding, walking and visiting 'The Heads' where the lagoon and the ocean meet through a narrow rocky strait.

BAZBUS picked me up in the evening for the short drive to Storms River. The landscape got better and better as the Tsitsikamma Mountains dropped down near the coast and meadows gave way to thick indigenous forest. Storms River village is my kind of place, and when I was shown my room at Tsitsikamma backpackers my eyes came out on stalks. Giant bed, luxurious sofa, full size bathroom and walk in wardrobe! Plus my own private deck onto the garden. I am putting down roots here for a few days to explore (thanks Mum and dad). An added advantage is that the hostel is self catering so I can take a break from restaurants. I slept like a log.....

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*Well the next chapter of this travelogue is being written while playing the waiting game. I am in Mpulungu at the southern tip of Lake Tanganyika, Zambia. I have 3 choices. MV Liemba, the passenger ferry, may arrive today or tomorrow to take me to Kigoma in Tanzania. I may be able to negotiate myself onto a cargo vessel to Bujumbura. Or I may have to go back inland for a circuitous bus and train trip of over 2000km to get to Kigoma by land. Who knows? I wait! TIA...*

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Storms River would best be described as a hamlet. Tucked in the forest between coast and mountains, it has a main street –couple of grocery stores and a coffee shop – plus a few lodgings and hotels. The rest of the dwellings are spread out in big plots surrounded by indigenous forest.

In my lazy days here I hiked all the available forest trails and took a long mountain bike ride through the gorge and down to Storms River mouth. In between times I read a book and thought a lot. Places like this are good for putting life into perspective.

Onward to PE (Port Elizabeth), a compulsory overnight stop as it is the night time junction point for the BAZBUS linking Cape Town with Durban. An industrial port selling itself as the 'Friendly City'. I was not there long enough to check this claim to fame. I slept a short night in a basic hostel, then off and away at the crack of dawn, on up the coast.

Soon after passing through East London the road climbs away from the coast into what used to be the tribal homelands (Transkei). During the Apartheid era an indigenous African needed a work pass to leave this area (we passed through the old border check point). It was generally only men who left to go and work on the farms and in the mines. Now it is a refreshing area of high altitude undulating hills and villages reminiscent of the Kenyan Highlands. This is the most 'African' countryside I have seen so far. Umtata, the regional capital, also feels like an up country East African town. The busy streets have a laid back slow pace. I feel very much at home (or homesick!!!).

It is in Umtata that I have to leave BAZBUS to join a shuttle the last 90km down to Port St Johns on the Wild Coast. The last 30km, cutting down through a steep valley to the coast, are beautiful.

Port St Johns, a small town squeezed between rock buffs at the river mouth, is a mix of local community plus a small hippy/Rasta type group. The steamy hot climate, remote location and laid back vibe has encouraged a number of people over the years to drop in, stay put and drop out. They now seem to spend their lives improving their sun tan, running backpacker hostels and smoking weed. (Maybe that should read in reverse order)

I spend my 2 days here reading, enjoying the view and strolling around the area. (in that order)

I left Port St Johns reluctantly to rejoin BAZBUS in Umtata. Partly because the 'soporific effect' of the place was beginning to sink in and partly as this signaled the end of my official holiday. By evening I would link up with Jess and Jason in Port Shepstone.

Mid evening J and J met me off the bus and took me out to the hill top farm cottage that Jason shares with a friend up near the Oribi Gorge. A tasty supper, followed by a lot of conversation, was followed by a good nights sleep.

Up early the next day, Jess took me for a spin through Oribi Gorge before doing a whistle stop tour of the community projects Jason is working on through the church. We also visited the strangely named 'Norwegian Settlers Church' through which these various projects are run. It is really encouraging to get an insight in to this work that is going on at a local level. It helps to put perspective on to our own struggles up in East Africa and shows how each of us getting involved locally can make a big difference.

(Stop Press: Congratulations J and J on your engagement)

Around lunchtime we hit the road in Jesses little jalopy and headed up the coast to Durban where I am to be hosted in the family home of Mandy and Sean. Here I am given a warm welcome and a most luxurious guest suite. Mandy treats hospitality as an art form. She seems to devote her life to feeding, mothering and advising all the short term volunteers who pitch up in her neighbourhood. Keep up the good work. You are blessing many and thanks for including me. I was also welcomed and adopted by her highly strung fleet of border collies.

My few days in Durban gave me a glimpse of the schools work that Jess is involved in. She is working alongside an American couple, taking a well produced life skills programme into township schools around Durban. It was good to see this in action and definitely Jess is in her 'growbag' doing this kind of work.

I didn't get into Durban city centre, but I did get to see one of the impressive shopping malls. More like a retail city, with everything imaginable available.....if you have deep pockets.

I was dropped early Friday morning at Durban airport. On a damp, grey day I searched out a café after check in for some breakfast. It was lack luster both in quality and customer service (Durban: You have some work to do before the World Cup). I ate my scrambled egg overlooking the soggy runway until I was called to the boarding gate for the short hop to Johannesburg.

At Johannesburg I checked in for the onward flight to Harare.

The 2 hour Comair flight bumped and jumped through the clouds, occasionally offering tantalizing glimpses of green Zimbabwe, criss-crossed with rivers and lakes.

We touched down on time at the big new and empty international airport at Harare. Our plane looked lonely and the arrivals hall was scattered with my fellow passengers and a few cleaning staff. I paid for my expensive visa (higher for UK passport holders) and was officially welcome to enter Mr. Mugabe's social/economic experiment.

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*I am still waiting for the elusive boat. Now, next time you eat a meat pie, enjoy it, savour it, appreciate every mouthful. Why?*

*When I found that the pause in my journey was to be extended by at least 2 more days, I realized my supply of Kwacha will not stretch to any more meals being prepared for me. So I wandered into Mpulungu town feeling very hungry and found an unexpected bakery taking fresh meat pies out of the oven. If you could see Mpulungu you would understand just how unlikely and welcome that is!*

*Anyway, here I continue to sit, wait, sleep and pray. The port is closed for the weekend. I appear to have secured passage on a Bujumbura bound cargo ship for Monday*

*But I am really beginning to like friendly, drowsy humid little Mpulungu. Maybe I will just stay here and fish. Maybe not! Just the other week I proved this is not my vocation when I fished in Zimbabwe. Final score after 4 hours: Ian: nil. Brett: Shrimp!! But that is a story for another chapter.*

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*Finally left Mpulungu yesterday but the adventures of the voyage must wait till later. This travelogue has only just reached Zimbabwe.*

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Asafa was waiting for me at arrivals with a big smile and a bear hug. Now begins a very busy few days. We drove the few kms into Harare city centre and caught up with news over lunch at Spur, Holiday Inn. Many restaurants and cafes are under nourished in Harare at the moment but this is one of the reliable ones. (eg: it has a menu)

We swung by Central Baptist Church to greet people, then back to Asafa's home in the suburbs to meet Sophie (his wife) Asafa jnr, Mirie and Maka (the 3 children). I was shown my comfortable room and large doses of Zimbabwean hospitality. In the evening we visited both youth groups at CBC.

Up early on Saturday for the BUZ (Baptist Union of Zimbabwe) youth workers training day. I taught as much as I could of our basic foundation of youth ministry module (seemed well received) then in the afternoon a few of the team took me for a city tour of Harare plus ice cream. Harare is still functioning on at least half its cylinders. (It was good ice cream as well.) To a first time visitor the city seemed not so bad. I was struck by the friendliness and generosity of the people and, everywhere I went in the country, the great desire for me to like Zimbabwe.

Sunday I attended all 3 services at CBC and was introduced to so many people my head was spinning!

On Monday, Asafa took me for a tour of greater Harare. This took in "High Density" where the general population lives and the "Gold Belt" where the tycoons (and politicians) live. In the afternoon/evening I continued the training by running a 'youth ministry clinic' with the team from CBC.

On Tuesday I had planned to explore Harare city centre on my own but Asafa received a call from a Kenyan/Zimbabwean church member wanting to offer us breakfast (in the mid morning) at Ambassador Hotel. The conversation was engaging and I ate the biggest and most cholesterol loaded breakfast I can remember. I skipped lunch and still didn't feel so hungry at supper time. In the afternoon/evening I met a group of seminary students interested in youth ministry.

Wednesday, my last day in Harare, we went up to Chinoyi (about 100km north of Harare) to see the caves. They are unexpectedly deep and most spectacular limestone caves with a fish-filled pure blue subterranean lake that up to now divers have been unable to calculate the depth of. An amazing experience to scramble inside with only a flashlight and no other tourists in sight.

I said my farewells in Harare on Thursday and mid morning boarded a crowded minibus for the 300km trip south to Masvingo. Uncomfortable but uneventful. I was disgorged in the centre of Masvingo 4 hours later. Masvingo feels like the clocks stopped 50 years ago. The wide and empty streets feel like “Wild west meets old England”

It was great to meet up with Brett and Odette back on their home turf. They took me to their lovely, crumbly house a few miles outside the town. Diesel, Rocky and Princess (the dogs) soon became my friends and Rebecca and Daniel adopted me as Uncle Ian.

On the Saturday we piled into the pickup with picnic and roared off to Great Zimbabwe. This is an extraordinary dry stone built rock fort and remains of an ancient town. Fascinating to explore and make presumptions about. The Shona people have claimed it as their heritage

The panoramic views towards Lake Kyle from the top of Great Zimbabwe encouraged a closer look. We drove on down to the dam and explored before heading home in the gathering dusk. En route back we pulled over so that Odette could buy a bumper crop of local field mushrooms from roadside traders.

On another morning we collected a full hind quarter of beef from the local abattoir and took it home to butcher for the freezer. As a novice I concentrated on the stewing beef while Brett dealt with the good steaks and roasts. We all dealt with quite a lot on the Braai in the evening !!!

It would appear from this travelogue that Brett and I had all the fun. Unfortunately for Odette she needed to work mornings and the kids were in school, whereas Brett had organized a few days leave.

Which is why we went fishing.....as you do when on leave.

We first passed by Johns place as he was to be our guide. This gave an interesting insight into how the ‘economic experiment’ has affected some of the older white people. John and his neighbour seem to be scraping an existence in outdated homesteads in the bush, full of memories but devoid of social security. John’s yard had an eccentric collection of decaying old vehicles of the 30s through to the 70s. Inside he showed us his artwork and his inventions; he is currently working on plans for a mine sweeping vehicle.

We then headed down to a beautiful and peaceful stretch of the river that John recommended to us as a prime fishing spot.

Prime it may have been (loads of fish jumping in the water) but after 4 hot hours Brett had caught (and thrown back) a 2 inch tiddler and I had caught 2 cattle ticks on my leg. And we both caught rocks at the bottom of the river with great accuracy. Fun nonetheless.

My time in Masvingo came to an end all too soon. Early morning had me crammed onto an ancient jalopy of a bus heading for Bulawayo. Under more comfortable conditions the journey would have been enjoyable. Instead it was backside torture.

The bus deserted us in a wasteland of a bus park way out of the city centre. I emerged tired, sore and completely disoriented. My top priority was to book an overnight sleeper ticket on the train to Victoria Falls. But where oh where was the station?

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*Dear Readers, This is as far as I have got for now so please forgive the wait for installment 2 that takes me over to the awe inspiring Vic falls and up through Zambia to Burundi. I am typing this back home in Kampala and now have to go up country for a couple of weeks. Hopefully this part of the travelogue will have you on the edge of your seats looking forward to the rest!!*

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