

Subj: African Safari, Dec 2014 #1
Date: 12/13/2014
Hi Everyone!

We're in South Africa!!!! We arrived in Johannesburg this evening, Sat, 13 Dec 2014. We had our evening dance at Greenfield Village -unfortunately I didn't get a single picture! My camera was already in our luggage & I forgot to grab it to come to the dance!!!!

Liz did take a picture of the Bon Voyage party sponsored by Herb & Cece!!



We didn't even go to bed (George laid down for a quick nap) and then showered & on to the airport by 5:15am!!! We were laughing at Ken's banana breakfast! It was pretty darn brown!!!



At Dulles we met up with Batchellor's. First a photo with Santa!!!



Then a boarding the plane & there's this one stinking couple that cheated by upgrading to Business Class!!! The rest of us in cattle car!!!





Made it to Johannesburg! We are staying overnight in an airport hotel, but got a picture of the downtown as we landed!! Looks pretty much like any big city!! A bit hazy!!



All showered & met downstairs for time together! This is going to be soooooo much fun!



The hotel is decorated for Christmas!



A few of us were not satisfied & wanted more time to unwind. So met up in our room!



Tomorrow morning we meet in the lobby & back to airport to fly to Victoria Falls. Sheridan's are to meet us at the airport here in Johannesburg & then we meet our African guide at the Victoria Falls airport & on to our first safari camp, Baobab Lodge in Chobe National Park, Botswana!!!! The adventure will really begin!!!

Hang on for more adventures!!!

Lots of love,

Pam & George

Subj: African Safari, Dec 2014 #2

Date: 12/16/2014

Good Morning Everyone!

So I left you with our plans to meet with the 2 other couples at the airport. & that worked out well. Those of us at the hotel had a nice night's sleep and then early morning breakfast at the Protea Tambo Airport Hotel.







It was a lovely breakfast -almost everything you could hope for -including omelets made to order.







Back up to the room to grab our bags. Quick picture of the lovely shower & the really interesting tree out our window! Have to find out what this is!!!









Got to the airport in plenty of time to do some window shopping. Have been told that this shop (Out of Africa) is the perfect place to buy souvenirs when we finish our safari! Wow! It had some awesome stuff!!







Even the decorations were awesome! We waited a bit for our flight to be called, then we were boarded on a bus to take us to the airplane. Easy flight on to Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, only 1 hour 30 minutes & they even served us wine & a hot lunch!





Took a while to get out of the airport. Had to talk to Customs & he was definitely taking his time! But Tinashe, our guide for our this adventure met us & got us loaded onto the bus to head to our first camp at Chobe National Park -Boabab Lodge.



The 2+ hour drive to the Lodge was an adventure in itself!! Immediately started seeing animals! Huge troop of baboons was the first sighting.





Then at the entrance to Botswana from Zimbabwe, we saw our first wart hogs & monkey's. Also had to step in a chemical compound to ensure we weren't walking Hoof & Mouth disease in to their cattle industry!









Also saw our first African Elephant, Common Zebra, & Cape Buffalo, Greater crested Corine. This is going to be an unbelievable trip!!!!





We arrived at the Baobab (named after the Baobab Tree) Lodge and the entire staff came out to meet us. It only has cabins for 8 couples and we have 7! We are the only guests! They served us an excellent dinner and I'll leave you with some views from the lounge! Note that we get to see Elephants enjoying the Chobe River!!! This is going to be an awesome adventure!!!

Stay tuned for more!!!

Lots of love,

Pam & George

Subj: African Safari, Dec 2014 #3 (Chobe NP)

Date: 12/19/2014

Good Morning Everyone,

Time is flying by. Will have to eventually publish the Wildlife Sighting List. You just won't believe it. Never in a million years would I have believed how awesome this really is!!! Our group is truly enchanted. We've already seen so many things and it's just the 2nd day of the actual safari portion!! We're here in the Chobe National Park at the Boabab Lodge (named after the awesome Boabab Tree. Anyway, let's get started, there are soooooooo many things to share!!

First off the view from the main lodge is incredible. I shared the one picture last time, let's just say that one could have sat in front of that view for the entire time and still be in total awe of nature. But then they fed us dinner & after a briefing about our days plan, they escorted us all to our cabins. This lodge only has 8 guest cabins (another for the guide). It is only a short walk from the lodge down the connecting trail to the cabins, but once they escort us to our cabins at night, we are not allowed to leave. We definitely all heard lots of animal noises throughout the night and none of us were inclined to be out on our own, so that didn't bother us at all!!

The next morning, they came around to wake us at 5:30am!! By beating drums! We had cheated & actually gotten up at 5am to have time for shower before breakfast at 6am.





The view from our cabin was spectacular also & here's looking down the trail to a few of the other cabins. Marlyn was heading to breakfast s we walked out also. We were on the road to our first real safari by 6:30am.



Some of us looked more ready for the safari than others!



The jeeps had 3 rows and I immediately hopped in and climbed to the rear seat! Highest row.





Our fearless leader is Tinashe, from Zimbabwe. He's been a guide for over 10 years.





Before going into Chobe National Park, we drove down below our camp to look for a mother leopard & cub. I didn't get a good picture of it, so not including mine, but the first thing they had shown us of the view from the lodge was where a leopard had stored a carcass in a tree down below at 6am that morning. Unfortunately for us, she had arrive at few minutes before 6am to retrieve it and take it to her cub!!!! So we looked for her every chance we got, but never found her. Also the night before, just before dinner, a pair of lions had crossed in front of the bus driver as he was getting ready to leave!!! But we never found them either. But while looking we saw Common Impala & Water Buck. The land across the river is the country of Namibia. Look forward to visiting there on our NEXT TRIP TO AFRICA!!!!



They also introduced us to the Boabab Tree -actually a succulent like a cactus, but grows HUGE (above) and the quintessential Thorn Acacia Tree that the giraffe loves to eat!



Then on into the park. And we were quickly introduced to the famous Dung Beetle! He rolls his balls of dung to attract a mate. The bigger his ball of dung, the easier for him to attract a female! When a female decides to accept his offer, she clings to the ball and he continues to roll it a bit while she lays her eggs in it. The baby beetles then have plenty to eat when they are born! The males are about 1 to 2 inches long and fly with a noise similar to a hummingbird. Later in the day I had one fly onto my shirt & fall to rest between my legs! I was too quick to get rid of it and didn't get a close up!!! He probably thought he'd found the biggest ball of dung in his life!!



We soon got excellent views of the Helmet crested Guinea Fowl -the African chicken! Saw many many many of these beautiful birds.



One of the first of many many thousands of Common Impala. This was a magnificent male enjoying a rest. By the way, I was not calling them Common -this is the official name of this type of antelope!!!





Although a bit blurry, this was the best I could do of them leaping across the road!





While down near the Chobe River, we found many flocks of Egyptian geese. And many more amazing birds that I'm not going to put the names to, just post some pictures.



And a group of young jackals.





A small bird that I can't remember the name, a regular wood squirrel & a Slender Mongoose. We spotted the mongoose because some birds were diving at him, trying to chase him away!!

I'm going to close this one now so I can try to ensure that at least one more travelogue goes out tomorrow. We have so far only had internet as we pass through the airports, so hoping that tomorrow we will be able to send/receive a few. Only had about an hour at the airport enroute from Chobe NP to Okavanga Delta.

Love to you all & wish you were here!!!!

Pam & George

Subj: African Safari, Dec 2014 #4 (Chobe NP continued)

Date: 12/19/2014

Hello Friends & Family,

I'll just continue with our very first morning safari. A bit of information, I apologize if I mislead you or misquote anything! So we are in Botswana, it is about the size of Texas. A democratic country land locked in the Southern part of the African Country. It is surrounded by Namibia on the west & north, Zambia, Zimbabwe on the east & South Africa in the south. We are currently on the eastern tip, just across the river from Namibia and mostly exploring Chobe NP with is the 2nd largest NP in Botswana. No hunting is allowed in the entire country of Botswana. Okay, I'll not bore you with anymore facts, on to some pictures!!!



Unfortunately, the first animal that I spotted (we sit 7 per Land Rover & all are busily "looking through the bush" as we are advised by Tinashe) was a dead elephant. It had apparently just died as there were no carrion feeders on or near it when we first saw it. Appears to be a young healthy male & we are unsure how//why it died, but will come back to it later to look for how nature takes care of it's dead & the cycle of life surrounding us here.



We shortly passed by a gang of male Cape Buffalo (note the zebra in the background!). Each animal species has it's own name for the groupings. Cape Buffalo can be in a herd or a gang. Figured 4 males should be a "gang!!" Keep in mind that I am using my own pictures from my own camera & I have practically NO ZOOM!!!! I will get the pictures from Michael Sheridan & Ken Davis later & they will have pictures that would show the ticks on these guys!!!!) Can't remember the name of the birds that act as groomers (& pests), but this one has one that is trying to clean his nose for him!!!!



We drove a bit closer to this dazzle of zebra (locals pronounce it ZEB ra, not ZEE bra). We saw huge herds in the distance, but we got very close to these guys.



And then it was time for our first "tea & pee" break!! We are not allowed out of the Land Rovers during our safaris, except for these designated stops which are in area identified for stops and have a few bush nearby that we can use to "mark our territories!!!" The guides first check the area by clapping their hands all around and looking under around any vegetation before allowing the men to go behind one bush and the ladies behind another!!! We were amazed that we see practically NO ONE else out in the park.

Learned later that all the National Parks in Botswana, Zambia, & Zimbabwe strictly limit the number of guides allowed in each day & give them an allowed route to drive. During the 3 days in Chobe National Park, I think we saw maybe 10 other vehicles & most of them were on the east side which is closer to Victoria Falls. Our guys were in constant contact with each other, but we drove on different roads & only converged for the tea & pee breaks or if we had found something significant that they wanted us all to experience.





More of the beautiful Common Impala -this a bachelor herd -all young males not breeding yet. They get together to practice sparring to prepare for future battles to claim their own females.





Another huge dazzle of Zebra along the main road back towards our lodge.



We looked behind & realized that another part of the herd was crossing the road behind us!!



We made our way back to the lodge for a short break for lunch and some rest (about 2 hours). Decided to take a couple of pictures to give you more of an idea about our cabin. Our bed was equipped with mosquito netting that was set up when we got back at night to sleep. It was difficult to figure out how to get in and out of it without leaving a gap for the bugs. As long as the lights were out, we didn't really see or hear any bugs, but were happy to have the nets, just in case. As an aside, we had bought these little head lamps and were glad to have them so that we could get up at night & not have to worry with looking for a light switch that might wake each other up. The window beside the door was made of net and had a flap outside to drop down for rain or wind. I didn't get a picture of it, but above the door and up to the peaked roof tent ceiling, the front was all open netting.





After our rest, we headed back up to the lodge for a visit from 3 of the local ladies to explain about the local practice of making baskets. She explained how they stripped, soaked & dried the palm leaves. Then used an assorted number of items to dye them ranging from aluminum cans to alevera leaves to a local bush called Blue Bush or a "toothbrush" Bush. They even sometimes use carbon paper and for the reds, a commercial powdered dye. The "toothbrush" bush is also used historically to brush their teeth. It's roots will also color your lips! I think we should all use the toothbrush bush as most all of them have fabulous teeth!!! I bought a woven bracelet from each of them -\$3 each. Love wearing them as I didn't bring any jewelry with me.





We wandered around the lodge for a few minutes before heading out on our evening (4pm) safari. Found a snake by the dipping pool (none of us brought swim suits or had time to use it). I'll close now & will cover the evening safari later!
Lots of love,

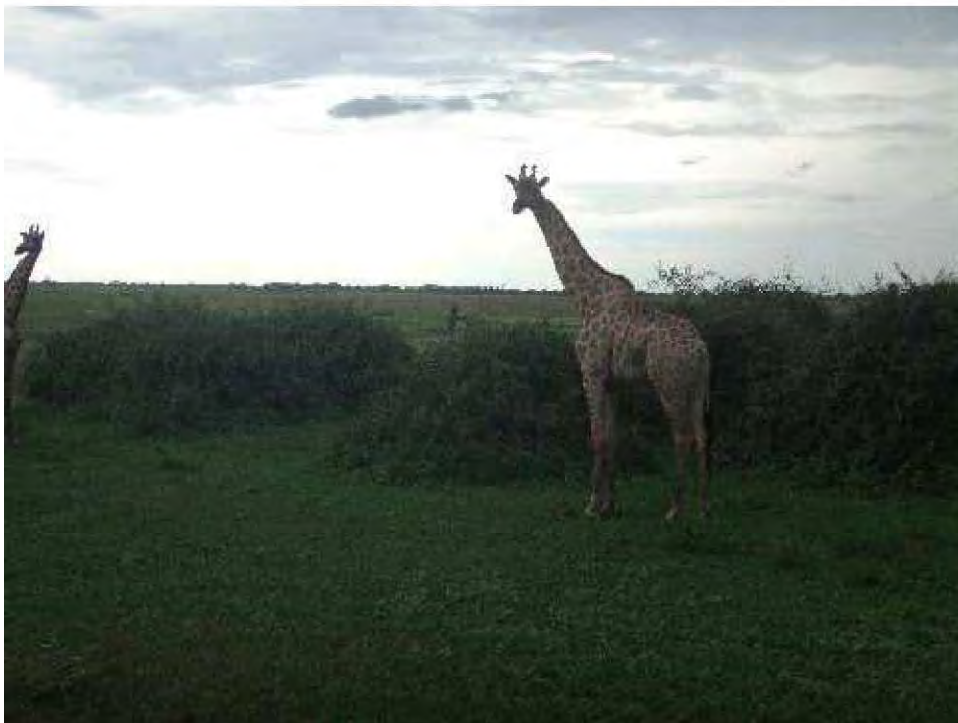
Pam & George

Subj: African Safari, Dec 2014 #5 (Chobe NP Evening Safari)

Date: 12/21/2014

Hi Guys,

This is going to be a huge overall travelogue!! Soooooo much to share! So -on with the show! Not sure I mentioned before, but days are divided up into a fairly standard routine; 3 nights at each park. If we arrive early enough, we get checked in and go on an initial safari. At some parks, the drive from airport is a safari in itself. At Chobe, the 1st one, the long drive from the airport was by bus, so we didn't get an evening safari until the next day. So, there is always an early morning safari -6:30am until 10:30-11ish with a morning tea & pee break, back for brunch & rest, then evening safari after a high tea (with snacks about 4pm) leaving at 4:30pm and until dusk. So far temperatures have been wonderful. Cool in the morning, even requiring a light jacket due to driving in the open land rovers & then generally warm to hot afternoons and the temp starts dropping back down quickly in the evening and showers late in the evening after we get back to camp. At Chobe, we had to stop & show our passports before entering each time. Okay, enough of that -lets look at pictures!!







One of the first discoveries was a tower of giraffe!





There were 2 juvenile males & a larger female -Mom with 2 children? The boys were busily sparring -bumping each other with their necks. Supposedly playfully, but we could still hear the noise of them slamming each other.



Apparently the juveniles were still young enough that she was allowing them to nurse.



Moving on, we found a family of Banded Mongoose. There were a lot of them, but were busily running to & fro & I couldn't get a good shot with my little camera. I suspect Ken has some good pictures!



Then a lovely shot of a Fish Eagle. They are similar to our Bald Eagle, but the white extends my further down on their shoulders. Lovely bird!!



And a tribe of Water Buck. They are about the size of Caribou.





And a troop of Baboons. The babies were adorable! And they are quite noisy!



And an Open Billed Stork (quite a common sighting!!), but the back drop with the clouds & the dead tree made it very interesting.



We made another stop at the dead elephant. Only been a few hours since we passed by this morning and there was nothing around. Now it is covered with White Backed Vultures (the only type of vulture in Chobe NP). Check out the one guy trying to claim the territory. Nature is starting to claim it's own!



And how about this tiny baboon on a nearby tree watching the action!



Just down from the elephant, here a conglomeration (this is not an "official" term of Impala, Zebra, & Vultures. Awesome!!!



On to our evening "sundowner Tea & pee break", I decided to do a size comparison to let you see some of the piles of elephant dung we saw EVERYWHERE!!!!





Heading back towards the lodge, we found a heard of Kudu. They are a bit larger, maybe the size of Elk?



Back at the Lodge, we shared some chatter before dinner! & wine of course!!



Then our dinner was served. Each evening there was a buffet and the evening staff gave us the menu before there meal. The starter & usually the desert was served individually to you, but you served yourself the main courses, starches & vegetables. There was always a vegetarian dish for our 2 Vegetarians. I enjoyed that, because that dish was always especially flavorful!!



Finally the end of our first full day on Safari!!!! We were escorted back to our cabins for a short sleep before tomorrow's full day safari!!! Stay tuned!
Miss you all!!
Lots of love,

Pam & George

Subj: African Safari, Dec 2014 #6 (Chobe NP Full Day Safari)

Date: 12/23/2014

Hi Guys,

In order to cover more information, I'm going to try & only talk about the new animals. Many of them, we saw multiple times (all in different locations & all acting a little differently with different background settings), but I'd be doing an encyclopedia if I try to cover it all!!!!!! So with little ado, let's start Tues, Dec 16th.



Started with that incredible view!!!!



Quick morning breakfast & Janie presented Diana with some "special" binoculars!! They have little penguins on them!!!





Our first congregation of the African Elephants was very exciting of course. They were in the woods, so we never got a clear view of all of them at once. Believe there were 10 or so. None of them particularly paid any attention to us, even the baby ignored us completely. The big matriarch did keep an eye on us, but felt we were not any threat. That was interesting as a matter of fact. We were told numerous times to never stand in the Jeep. As long as the vehicle was viewed as a whole by any of the animals, it seemed to be acknowledged as non competitive or threatening. The guides said if we stood to where they could recognize that we were "human" or 2 legged animals, they could either run or charge. Either is not good, so low murmuring voices and gentle movements were the best.



In the presence of them, you just felt respect & awe!!! They do lots of damage to the environment, sometimes ripping bark off trees to get the minerals underneath, killing the trees. Sometimes accidentally pushing them over while trying to scratch their backs. If they visit a farmers field, he can count the entire crop as a loss for the year. The government is trying to offer money when that

happens to try & keep the farmers from killing them.



I know this picture is blurry, but wanted to show a Namibian shepherd guarding his herd of cows at the river. We were told that they let them graze during the day, then pen them up at night to protect them from the predators.





I know I've shown both giraffe & warthogs, but couldn't resist sharing this shot with them both! It was always amazing to us to see them peacefully sharing the property! Warthog kisses!!





Darn, this is sooooo difficult to cull through & only share the best. The baboon babies were just so adorable!



Okay, now this is grizzly, but we came back to the elephant. Probably 24 hours since it died. It is totally covered in vultures & now there are 2 hyenas sharing in the feast.



Here's a blowup of the Spotted Hyenas. One is keeping a lazy eye on us -too bloated to move & the other is still tearing away at the flesh. Not the open billed stork calmly pecking within a few feet of the hyena. He knows it has better food choices nearby, so not at all worried.



The biggest of the Yellow Cats (Ha Ha)! The road had been freshly grated for us! Got rid of all the potholes!



Excuse me if I mislabel something. Normally I can check the internet as I go along, but don't have that luxury here. I believe this was a Lilac Breasted Rollar (but could be a Carmine Bee Eater!!!). The birding has been spectacular. I've always enjoyed birds, but never had the luxury of having someone point them out & describe them & their habitats!! Loving this! My little camera can't catch the details & the color. You'll have to get them from Michael & Ken. They promise to share their best. So far (this is day 2 of the safari, right?), they each have almost 1000 pictures!!!



Never got tired of the clusters of Impala. Their dainty little feet, the gorgeous black markings on their rumps, & their beautiful faces. This was a herd of girls.



Another Fish Eagle, but wanted to share the beautiful green surrounding the Chobe River in the distance and the interesting termite mound in the forefront. Many larger ones around of course, but the rusty copper of this one was pretty. The termite were ferocious. They don't eat wood here, they eat carrion. The plains of Africa are kept clean by these scavengers!! More about them later.





Which ever one the other was, this is the other! Or something like that!!!



No comment!! And that took us up to another Tea & Pee break. I'll stop now before going on to lunch & the afternoon. Love to all!!!!

Pam & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #7 (Chobe NP Full Day Cont)
Date: 12/22/2014
Hi Guys,

Lets get right to it!! Our plan for this day was to work our way as far to the east side of the park as possible.



So after our break under a beautiful Boabab tree, we continued on. Saw lots more stuff. Unfortunately, we also came upon another dead young elephant. Found it due to seeing trees full of vultures. Won't post a picture of it. Nothing there except more vultures. Our guide, Tinashe said that they have had problems with anthrax in past years and it would reside in the soil, so it's possible it was out again. He was going to report it.



Got a close up of the Fever Berry or Jackel Berry Tree. Historically used by the locals to medicate for fevers. Also the jackets love to eat the berries.



Took a lovely panoramic of a bend in the Chobe River. Again, Namibia on the other side. Islands in the middle are like a no man's land.



Saw our first Nile crocodile, the only crocodile in this area. Didn't expect them to be so blond!!! There's 2 of them, lying in opposite directions.



Saw the Leopard tortoise, one of the Small Five. Big 5 are elephant, leopard, rhino, hippo, & lion. Small 5 have the same Big name, but are Leopard Tortoise, Rhino beetle, Ant Lion (same one I played with in Texas as a child!!), and Elephant something & Hippo something. Right this minute I

can't remember & don't have anything to look it up with!!! There's an ugly 5 too, can only remember that the Brown Hyena is on it -doubt that we'll see it!



George spotted a Water Monitor, he was pretty impressive (I mean the monitor -not George!!!!)
Most exciting!!! Our guide spotted a pride of 4 young males! They were very relaxed & calm under their shade tree!





You probably missed the 4th guy. It's easy to see the 2 on the right & especially the one in back that was grooming himself, but the 4th is on the left and in the shadows. Blew him up so you could catch his face in the bushes! Our guide, Moses, somehow caught them as we were passing by. We called the other group to us. Have no idea how he managed to see them!!



Then we spotted our very first Hippo!!!! He was blowing & huffing out in the river. The other group saw 2, but we only saw the one.



Then it was time for lunch. We pulled into the campground picnic area and the staff from our lodge

was there already setting up a lunch for us!



There were small Velvet Monkeys everywhere. Waiting for their chance to steal anything they could!!



I forgot to get a picture of the food, but the best thing was the tiny little roasted sweet potatoes. About 3 inches long & white meat, but the sweetest potatoe I have ever tasted -no seasoning, just roasted in the skin.



The next site was a Warthog family! Even Warthog babies are adorable!!!



Blew them up so that you could see them properly.





Found a large family of Greater Kudu. They were usually shy & ran away, but this tribe of Kudu were quite relaxed near us. As the afternoon went by, we saw lots of other animals we had already seen once, so I'm not including the pictures: Giraffe, Impala (called them the most dependable animals, because they are always ALWAYS there!), Warthogs, lots & lots of birds.



We were almost up to the highway back towards the lodge when our guide got a radio call. He didn't say anything to us, just turned around and soon we were FLYING back up the dirt road - screaming around corners & pushing through the brush. Soon we came upon our other group's Land Rover & we plowed off into the thicket. We are really not supposed to be off road in the National Park's, so we knew something was up. Within a couple of seconds we realized he was taking us in for an upclose of a Lion pride, 4 adult females, a huge maned male & 6 cubs. They said later (we couldn't talk while we were there) that they felt comfortable getting us so close because there was also a dead elephant there and they knew they were all satiated from food & relaxed because the male was with them. Very very very exciting. I'll close with just some pictures.







We drove all the way around them, actually cutting through in between the male & the dead elephant to get to the other side of the females & cubs.



Had to include one gory shot of the dead elephant. That made 3 young dead elephants in 2 days. Obviously there is something wrong!





Finally left them alone & headed back.





Only other significant sighting was a Sable (another antelope) crossing the road in front of us!



Saw some more Warthogs with babies -I know I know I said I wouldn't keep repeating. But they are soooooo adorable!

I'd better close with this. Trying to keep each of the travelogues from being too big as they are more difficult to send and we only have a few minutes available at the airports. So bye for now & wish you were all here with us! It's an amazing place!! Lots of love,

Pam & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #8 (Last night in Chobe NP)

Date: 12/22/2014

Good Day Everyone,

Would like to preview this to let you know that I have gotten several days behind in my travelogues. Right this minute, I'm typing this from our Tented Camp in Kafue NP in Zambia. They have given us a HUGE 2 bedroom Tented Cabin with a sitting room that has more square footage than our RV and full glass/screened walls overlooking the confluence of the Lufupa & Kafue Rivers. George is taking a nap (we have been taking them in shifts so that we each have some computer time!!!). So I took my nap first. Anyway, our deck is hanging out over the river and we constantly hear the snort/grunt of the Hippos in the Rivers. So far this has undoubtedly been the most exciting memorable vacation ever. Can't wait to plan another visit to see more of this amazing continent with all these exciting adventures. Soooooooo, that said -back to the log!



We came back from each days drive to be greeted by the friendly lodge staff. They wave & yell greetings & meet you with either warm or cool cloths (depending on the weather).



Must include this one shot of Sue's graceful exit from the Land Rover (she was actually trying to get her backpack out!). What are friends for anyway?????



And of course, the always incredible view from the lodge porch!





After the Lion pride viewing, we were all in an extremely happy mood and Michele entertained us with a "show of horns!"



We watched a storm approach, but it didn't hit us until long after we had had our dinner, entertainment and were tucked in for the evening!

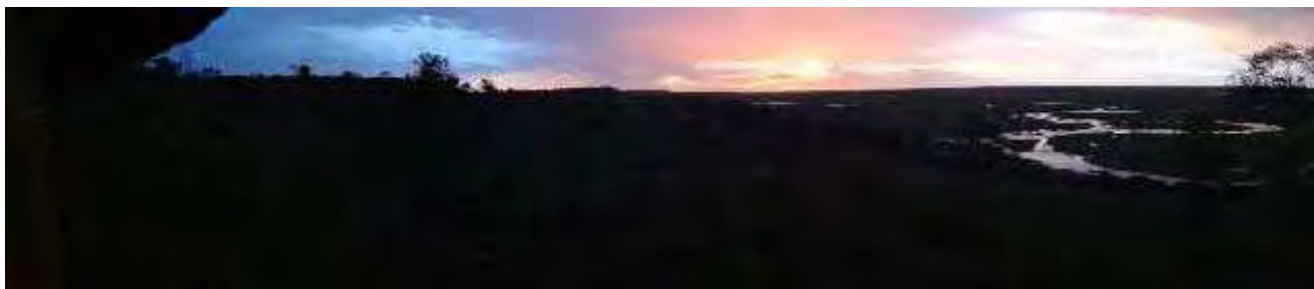


On the last night at each camp, the lodge staff would do something special. At Boabab, we were supposed to have our dinner outside, but since they were afraid the rain would hit, they moved out the dinner tables & we formed a U with the chairs. SP, one of our 2 local driver/guides played the Chief & explained how the dinner would be served. We were not to eat with utensils except for plates (& our wine glasses of course). Most of us played along, but a few cheated! At this camp, the men were served first at dinner (how annoying!! Ha!!).





In between courses, one of the girls came around with water to rinse off our fingers.



I snuck out of the circle a couple of times to get a picture of the incredible sunset!!!





My pictures didn't turn out very well, but after we had dinner, all the staff (& more folks that showed up that we hadn't seen before) sang & danced for us. Their voices would harmonize like a church choir (later when we asked, they said most of their singing practice was from church) and although we didn't recognize the words, most were happy songs. Their last one did include some words like Beautiful Botswana & thanks to our Beautiful guests! I didn't get any pictures because I was dancing like everyone else, but when they asked us as guests to do something for them, we all danced the adorable little cha to I Want a Hippo for Christmas!!! Great fun and they seemed to be thrilled! Said that usually the guests either did nothing or sang some simple kids song. Anyway, it was wonderful fun and now we can say that we have Round Danced in Botswana!!!!



Not a terribly long travelogue, but think I'll stop here in case we get a chance to send these tomorrow when we travel from Zambia to Zimbabwe.

It's almost Christmas!!! Wishing you all a wonderful day & sending all our love!

Pam & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #9 (Chobe NP to Okavango Delta)

Date: 12/24/2014

Hi Everyone,

I'm anxious to get you on to the next Safari camp, so lets get right to it!



Had one last view from the Boabab Safari lodge. So incredible! There were Water bucks, baboons & all kinds of birds down there to see us off! But had to get going really early! Wake up call at 5am!!



The entire lodge staff was there to say So long & bid us well! Such sweet caring people!!







We loaded up into the bus after breakfast & the drive back through Chobe NP to Kasane was full of animals!!! Saw Spotted Hyena twice, Elephants, Cape Buffalo & Impala!! Just amazing!





We got to fly in the little 4 seater Cessna 206 plane to the Okavango Delta. It was about an 1 1/2 hour flight. Absolutely beautiful clear day! Perfect for flying!!



There were 2 huge Marabou Stork on the runway as we taxied out. Just glad they didn't decide to take off with us!!





The others all flew in a 12 seater called a Caravan. It was much faster than us, so we took off first and they soon passed us. They really only landed about 15 minutes before we did, so they just waited for us on the runway!



We were flying from Kasane in the top right of Chobe NP to Banoka Bush Camp, just on the top eastern edge of the Okavango Delta.



We flew low enough that we could actually see some animals from the plane. Watched the watering holes and saw animals several times. Actually spotted a Giraffe as we were landing, but didn't get a picture. Originally thought this was Elephants, but Tinashe assured me that they were Cape Buffalo. Look how many there are and how they are following in line!!!!



The guys that bring our luggage sit at the middle of the runway to make sure no animal runs out at the last minute!!!



They were all there waiting for us and we took a short safari drive enroute to the camp.



We had Land Rovers once again and our first guide was Lucas.



One of our first sightings here was a grey billed hornbill. The hornbill was one of our most common birds & we saw grey, red, & yellow billed hornbills. Later I'll show another couple of them too. When flitting in the bushes, even their speckled feathers & white tipped tail became recognizable.



The forested area around our Banoka Wilderness Tented Camp on the northeastern edge of the Okavango Delta was much different from Chobe National Park.



The soil was Kalahari sand. Very fine & white. The recent rains made puddles on the road from the jeeps driving & compacting it.



Started seeing lots of tiny little squirrels.



Saw lots of Water Buck with their easily distinguishable toilet ring bull's eye on their rumps!!!





And started to spot lots of Hippos.





And more Giraffe! Love watching them stretch their long necks to eat the tender tops of trees & bushes that none of the other animals can reach!





First view of our camp across the marsh land!



Managed to catch one picture of the African Monarch butterfly. They are around everywhere, but really really hard to catch on film!!



As we now know is the standard -the lodge staff were all out to welcome us with singing & calls of greeting.



The main lodge was lovely. This camp is about 4 years old & built on stilts overlooking some of the Delta Marshland. The watering hole has a resident crocodile & the Reed buck, Hippos, & Water buck commonly drink there.



As usual, they briefed us on the camp rules (no one out alone at night, laundry is free, etc, fed us, then assigned us our rooms & escorted us there to unpack & rest a short time before coming back for an evening drive. I'll close this one now & show our rooms & the evening drive next!

Lots of love & Hope you are all well & Happy!

Pam & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #10 (Okavango Delta 1st evening drive)

Date: 12/24/2014

Hello Friends & Family,

We'll continue on with a few shots of our room. Although I had read how nice the accommodations were to be, I am still blown away as to how nice they are! Easy to forget you are in the African Wild (until you hear the animal grunts outside the tent & the amazing bird sounds in the morning!!!).







It's quite beautiful with running water, king size bed, double sink, shower, toilet & a beautiful deck with a gorgeous view of the watering hole.





Walking back up to the lodge, it's very green. Every cabin has it's own solar water tank. There's a really nice seating area (which we didn't get to use much because they keep us on the run!!!).







Our afternoon high tea was yummy and it's not everyday that you get to eat a snack while looking out at a floating crocodile!!!!!!



The afternoon safari was totally full of wondrous things. Most of the animals we had already seen before, so won't bore you with too many pictures, but some were just too cute not to share! Never tired watching the Giraffes. They were just so incredibly elegant & amazing. Watching them walk was really neat. The legs on each side move together, so they have this really smooth elegant gait.





We saw lots & lots of hippos. Many out of the water. WOW! They are soooooooo big!!! And make lots of noise!



Saw so many incredible birds. Mike & Ken got much better pictures & took notes on their names. I'll be able to post better later on Shutterfly with names. Since I can't look things up on the internet, I can't confirm things. I think this is a Starling. They are very common birds, but they are just beautiful -dark blue iridescent feathers that just shimmer in the sunlight. Almost like hummingbirds feathers. Sort of remind me of our Grackles the way they call. Very very noisy!



Came upon this really cool Cape Buffalo skull. Wasn't it thoughtful of him to die with his head on the stump! Ha!





We've been diligently hunting for a Leopard & I thought I had spied one creeping in the grass, but it was a Velet monkey that came leaping out!!! Gave us all a start!!





This Coppery Tailed Coucal was around a lot. The flash of coppery red in the bushes was beautiful!



Loved seeing the Hippos out of the water & stomping through the grass! They usually only come out of the water & graze at dusk & in the dark, but it was cool enough that they were all out early!





Saw several different types of Kingfisher. Pied, Malachite, Great, Half collared, I think there were even more!! I think I could be a "Birder". But it sure makes it easy to have a guide with you who can immediately identify them all, by a flash of color or their calls!



The large Grey Heron looked marvelous standing tall behind all the Impala. I had lots of trouble recognizing the difference between all the types of Antelope! The Guide tried to help me understand that much of the identification was just not by looks, but by location -some like water, some marsh, some woods & that some congregate in groups and some like the Reed bucks are always either alone or in a couple. I could always tell the Impala if I could see their pretty little rumps with the bright black markings!



So this big brown bird is a Hammer Kop. His head is shaped like a hammer (anvil), sharp & pointy on one side & blunt on the other. The picture below is of his huge nest. Our guide laughingly said they call him the "American" bird because he builds an unnecessarily big house for himself!!



We had to forego our usual "sundowner" where we meet the other group & have a drink out in the wild because our Jeep had a flat! The guys got it changed fairly quickly, but decided, we'd had enough fun & went on back to camp!







It was a really lovely sunset. We actually got to see a Momma Hippo & Baby running along the road as we made our way back to the lodge. That was exciting!! They were trumbling along at a pretty pert clip! Then back at the lodge, we had our Sundowner there and then a lovely supper before ending another AWESOME day in Botswana!!

Bye for now!

Lots of love & Good Health & Happiness!!!

Pam & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #11 (Okavango Delta 2nd Day, morning drive)

Date: 12/28/2014

Hi Guys,

I'm way way behind on our adventures, so I'll get right to it. Going to try & rush a bit to get caught up! Yea, right, you know how little I like to talk!!! Here we go!!





After our standard 6:30am breakfast, we were off and the first major sighting was a Tower of Giraffe. Not sure I mentioned about the Jeep logistics. We generally divided up with 7 of us in each jeep. In general, the girls split up, Daz with one group and Joyce in the other & they generally sat in the middle in their respective jeeps. What tended to happen was however we departed the airplanes, we loaded up as we got off and stayed with that seating arrangement throughout that camp visit. Tinashe would swap us from one guide to the other each day and then in our respective jeeps, we would change which row we were sitting in for each drive -like back row (great view, but bounciest) moved up to first row, first row moved to middle, middle moved to back & then continued. So each big drive, there was a rotation! So everyone got all the views. Our folks all shared with no complaint. Generally the girls stayed in either the front middle and Daz was occasionally given the shotgun seat next to the guide!!! We tried to make sure that Ken & Michael were split up because they were the ones with the super dooper cameras with the amazing zoom. And we all were thrilled when Michelle was in our jeep because she had the super dooper binoculars and spotted lots of harder to catch sightings! Janie was also a great addition

because of her fun sense of humor! Anyway, we all played well together!!! Apparently that was a surprising plus for the guides because most groups had at least one or two unreasonable folks that didn't share!!



Soon they were on the move -making them a Journey of Giraffe!!!! Love the names (must admit I have not really remembered them all -I have a list I downloaded before the trip and some of them that were special from the guides I have had to ask the other travelers! Janie remembered this one!!)



Perfect example of a Toilet seat display from a friendly Water Buck!!



There were soooooooooo many different birds, but my lack of zoom didn't allow me to capture most of them. Will share a link with you from Michael & Ken when we get back for those incredible pictures. In the meantime, I'll share the few photos of big birds that you can appreciate! This was a Verreaux's Eagle-Owl. There was a pair of them watching us watching them!!!





Someone spotted a hippo out of water, just sauntering along the edge of a clearing. As we were in a private game reserve, it was legal to head off road to get a closer look -as long as we didn't disturb the animals.



OOOOPPPPPPSSSS!!! Our adorable young guide, Wise (we had nick named him Wise Guy) misjudged the solidity of the ground and our off roading capabilities and there we were for 3 hours!!! Stuck in the mud! Found out later that during the wet this was fairly common. The only thing that caused us a bit more grief than normal was that we had lost radio communication with both our sister jeep (which had Tinashe on it) and the base camp!!!









While the girls amused themselves taking pictures of anything that didn't move, the men (believe it or not, that's George is his "safari garb"-pants, rain jacket & hat with the hangy down back flap) helped Wise Guy try putting limbs & branches under the tires to give us some traction. George even took the time to check the "latrine" behind the termite mound to make sure that there were no dangerous creature lying in wait to catch us as we "marked our territory!!"



They even tried pushing!!!



Luckily it was not raining & the temp was actually quite comfortable and it was morning. We had to keep Wise Guy comfortable with concentrating on getting us unstuck by promising not to wander out of the small clearing. We asked about walking back to the main road (probably 3 miles back!), but he said that was definitely unsafe -way too many wild animal predators in the area!!



Eventually we convinced Wise Guy to take a little break & he served us all our morning tea!! Still no break for him because he did all the serving and wouldn't let us help with that either!!!



Eventually the calvary arrived in the form of our sister jeep (Tinashe called them AAA!) & with all their help, they got us out! We had dug quite a crevasse!!!



Enroute back to camp, we spotted another hippo out of the water & Wise Guy -the Great Hippo Chaser volunteered to get us closer! We all so NOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!



Back in camp, Wise Guy jumped right in to act as Bar Tender!!! No rest for him!



I think I mentioned the Starling before? See how lovely it is? Came to check out the lodge!!



They served us a very fortifying lunch and we all retired to our cabins for a "10 toes up" Discovery session!!!





How many folks can say they could see Hippos grazing just past their tootsies while they were napping???

Enough for now!!! Sending lots of love & good wishes!!!

Lots of love,

Pam & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #12 (Okavango Delta 2nd evening Drive)
Date: 12/28/2014
Hi Everyone!

We'll continue with our afternoon/evening game drive as High Tea!



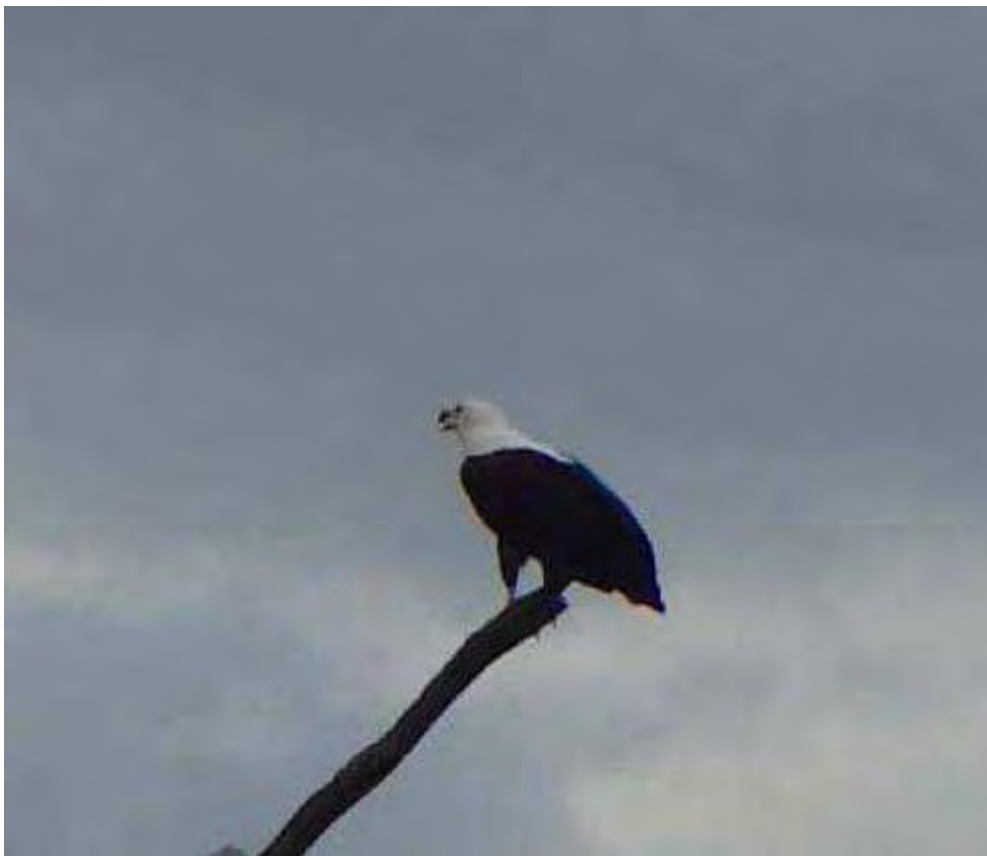


Wise Guy looked fresh & ready for the evening adventure! We stopped for lots of sightings: birds, Impala, all the usual things. Then he spotted this elephant bone and stopped to let us check out both the size & the weight. Nearly tipped myself out of the jeep when I tried to hold it up!!!!





He pointed out a Sausage Tree! These seed pods are enormous (will show a picture of the pod being held later to give you a comparison for size). Started singing "Don't sit under a sausage tree" with anyone else but me!" Our guide said the darn things are soooooo heavy they would knock you out if they hit you on the head!!!



Saw a nice Fish Eagle posing on a dead tree branch! Such a gorgeous bird!



Saw the Red Lechwe. A different kind of antelope!



Cool close up of the Hammerkop -remember the "American" bird with a head like an anvil?



Then the pinnacle of the sightings!!!! A lion & lioness in the throes of their honeymoon!!! Apparently this ritual lasts about a week. (until the female goes out of Estroes). During that week, they mate about every 20 minutes -not stopping to eat or hunt, just taking care of the important business at hand.











We watched for quite a while. They would stir, do there business, then collapse again. Once he tried & she was not ready & gave him a nip & a roar! Wise Guy kept trying to get in touch with Lucas in the other Jeep, but we were too far apart. We all agreed to leave & see if we could get within range to call them in. So headed out. Took us about 20 minutes to find them & then lead them back to the scene.



Included this panoramic shot to show you how close we were all to the couple! Such an amazing experience.





We moved around several times to get a different prospective. Finally decided that we should leave them be & got back to our hunting!



Almost immediately came upon a huge herd of Impala. Hope they move away, before the couple finish up and start to look for some fast food!!!



Made one more awesome sighting! This adorable little Pearl Spotted Owlet. It was probably on 5" high. Just made you want to pick it up and cuddle it!!!



Also got this Tawny Eagle in flight. Had several more bird sightings and saw a Springhare, but the lighting was not good enough for my camera to catch them.



Sunset was beautiful on the entire drive back! We got back to camp & had a wonderful dinner in the lodge, then back for a quick nights sleep. This cabin does not have mosquito netting and we couldn't cover the screens, so quick to bed so that we didn't have to use any lights to attract bugs. Couldn't even use the ereader light, the bugs were too strong. George said it was buggier than Texas!!!!

Goodnight for now!!

Lots of love,

Pam & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #13 (Okavango Delta, 3rd day, Morning Drive & Canoe)

Date: 12/29/2014

Hi Guys,

Moving right along, lets get to our next day's Hurd's version of the National Geographic epilogue!!!







Another early morning start -darn, I could get to really like this -NOT!! Seriously I had dreaded the early mornings, but the excitement of each day's hunt really gets the adrenaline flowing! Never having done anything like this before, I was rather amazed at how exciting it is to scan "through the bushes" looking for something -anything that is out of the ordinary. Amazing how the eye is drawn to colors, shapes, movements that stand out. You are scanning grass, leaves, branches & suddenly you realize you are looking at eyes, or legs, or a colorful shape that's moving! And even in a couple of days, we could recognize the flash of the hornbill or the white of the dove's tail feathers. And the bounding golden rumps of the Impala's!! Truly fascinating! And the sounds! Birds calling, hippos grunting, baboons chattering. Took a while, but got to recognize the Francolin's griping that sounded like Baboons!! Actually walked past one on the trail and watched it's throat moving while is griped at the world!!



Never tired of seeing the Impala. Unfortunately they were described as the McDonald's burger of the Bush!!! Ever present food source for all the predators! Got some interesting facts about them:

the standard gestation period could be lengthened by at least a couple of weeks to match the start of the wet or of the food being available. And if the food source is not available, they can actually abort the fetus so that they can get pregnant again quicker, so that the infant does not starve. Nature is truly amazing! Also they mostly give birth at the same time so that there will be many of them to make sure a lot make it past the predators!!



This morning's drive was quite short because the real focus was to be a mokoro canoe ride in the Delta. Thought I'd just show some of the pleasant driving conditions & how pretty & green everything was. Rains had only started about 2 weeks ago. Apparently in the past few years, the rains have been coming later & later. But it only takes a couple of rains & it's a complete transformation! There is still water here year round & the amount of water is more to do with the rains from the northern Angola area, but things do get greener & busier in the wet season! Even in this short drive, we saw Kudu, more Impala, Reed Buck, Water buck, Giraffe, & birds galore!!!



We did see another Mother Hippo & baby casually tromping across the field in front of us! Caught a snapshot of this lovely colorful bird & it's definitely a Lilac Breasted Roller!!







We arrived at the Mokoro Canoe launch site & got a casual safety briefing & loaded up!. Traditionally these canoes were carved out of one single tree trunk -usually the Mopane trees, but this one is rubber/plastic/vinyl. Very lightweight & flat, it can easily glide across the shallow water & the guides generally stand in the back & "pole" them. When the water is deep, they cannot use them as their poles can't push off the bottom.



Our Guide, Lucas, had gone on ahead by himself to check on the Hippo. Definitely do not want to get too close to them in the water. If we annoyed them, then could easily tip us or bite the canoe in half!!!!



Take a look at the concentration on Michael's face! This trip has turned him into a Birder!! He only brought his small camera on the Mokoro, the big one was just too expensive to risk!





Went right through some lovely stands of water lily's. The Mokoro sits so low in the water, you can't see much around you. The locals would normally use them for transportation from village to village or to fish.



These water reeds are dried & woven to make their floor mats. Can't remember what they were called!



Did get this nice shot of both a Anhinga or African Darter (have them in Florida too) and a type of Cormorant.



We spent a few minutes chatting about this shrubbery. It's called a Blue Bush because they use it to dye reeds blue to make bracelets & bowls. It's also called the toothbrush bush because they use it to brush & floss their teeth in the bush!!!





Finished the float & headed back to the lodge for lunch. They greeted us with cheers & cool minted washcloths & we found that they had put up a Bush Christmas tree while we were out!!!

Had a great lunch, then time for our 10 toes up Discovery time!

Lots more to come! Hope you aren't bored! We certainly aren't. This is most definitely the most exciting vacation we've ever ever had!!

Lots of love,

Pam & George

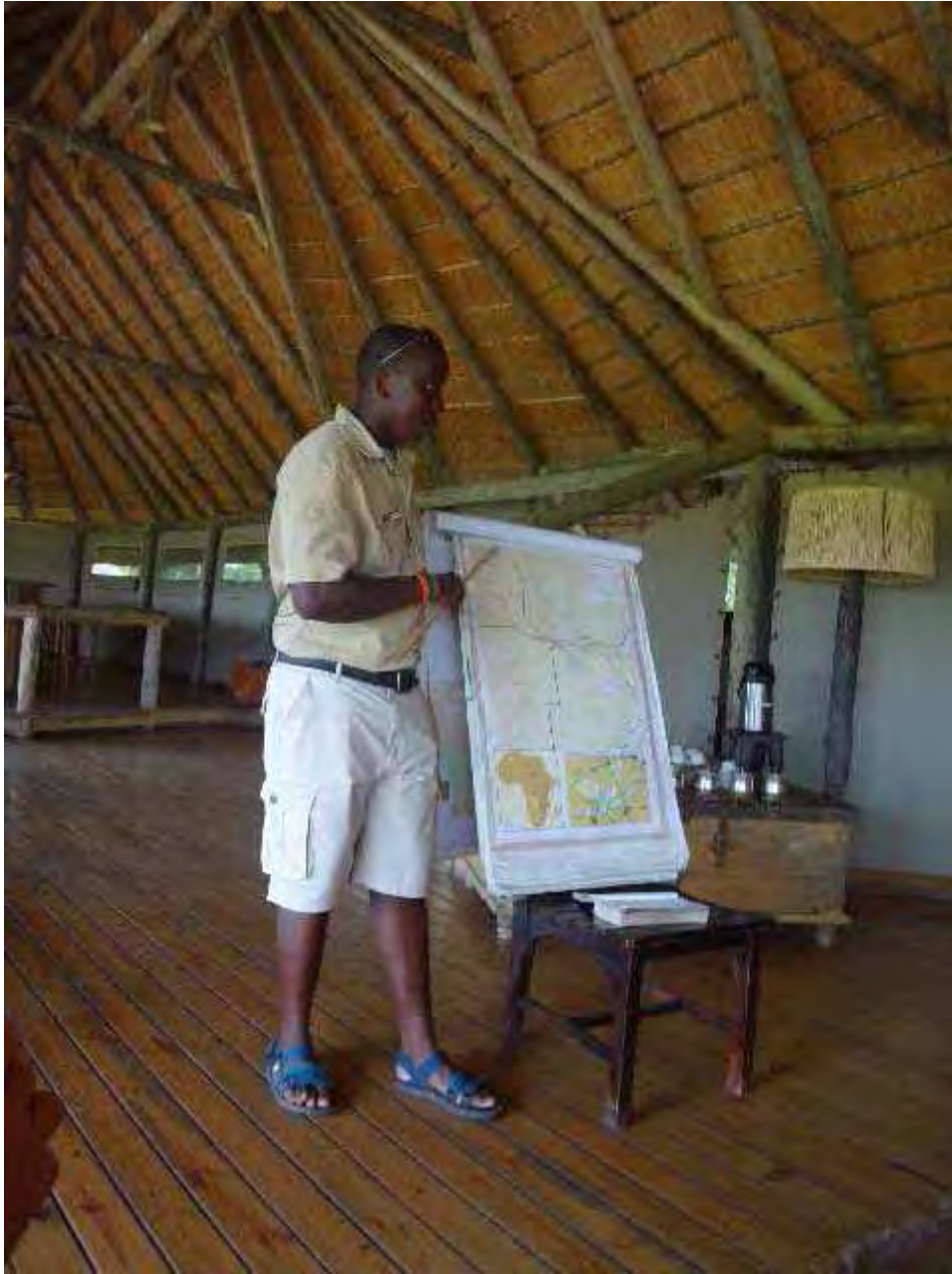
Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #14 (Okavango Delta, 3rd Day, Evening)
Date: 12/30/2014

Good Evening Friends & Family!

Man, coming to our last night in Botswana! Hate to leave! It's been such an awesome experience!

So lets get to the last night!!





OAT (and GCT, the parent company) likes to have their travelers know something about the culture & history of the countries they visit, so Wise was assigned to give us a talk about Botswana. He did quite a fine job, even discussing the original Teutonic plates & the movement & combination of many of the rivers that flow down from Angola & form the Okavango Delta before flowing on to Victoria Falls & eventually the Indian Ocean! Also talked a little about the Democratic history & the Kalahari Desert! Very interesting. I'm amazed that these guys can be so knowledgeable about animals, plant life, driving a Jeep, AND be able to give a lesson on History & Geology!!! Very impressive!

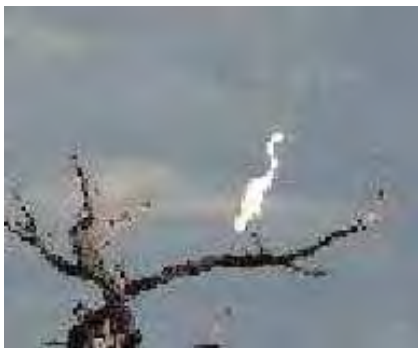


They fed us AGAIN (Tinashe keeps saying that they try to feed us every 2 hours!) and then we finally headed out on our final safari drive in Botswana!

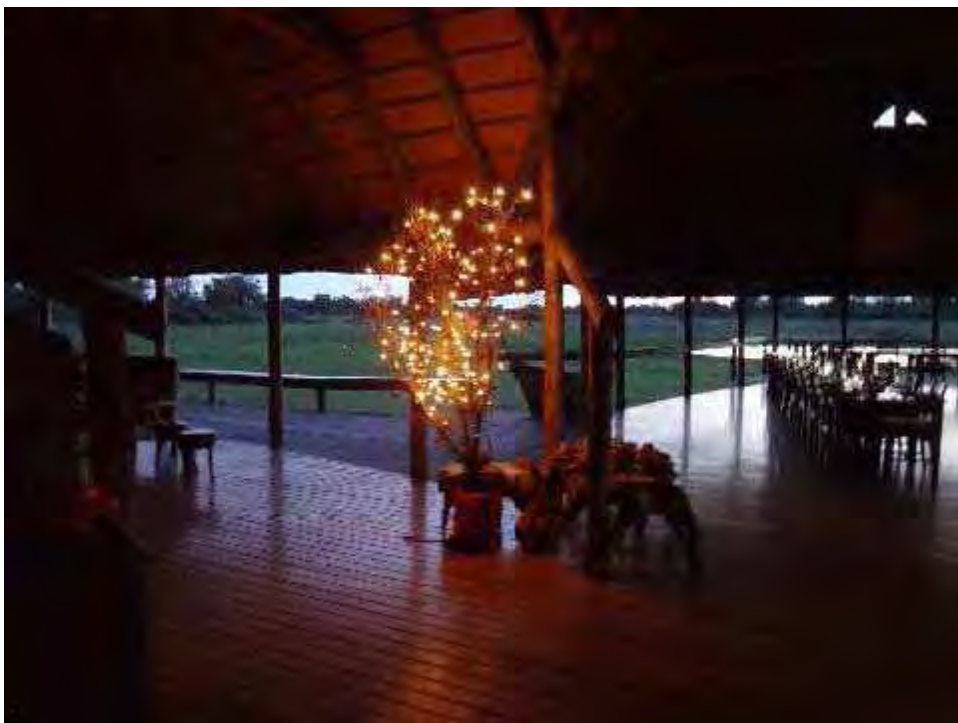


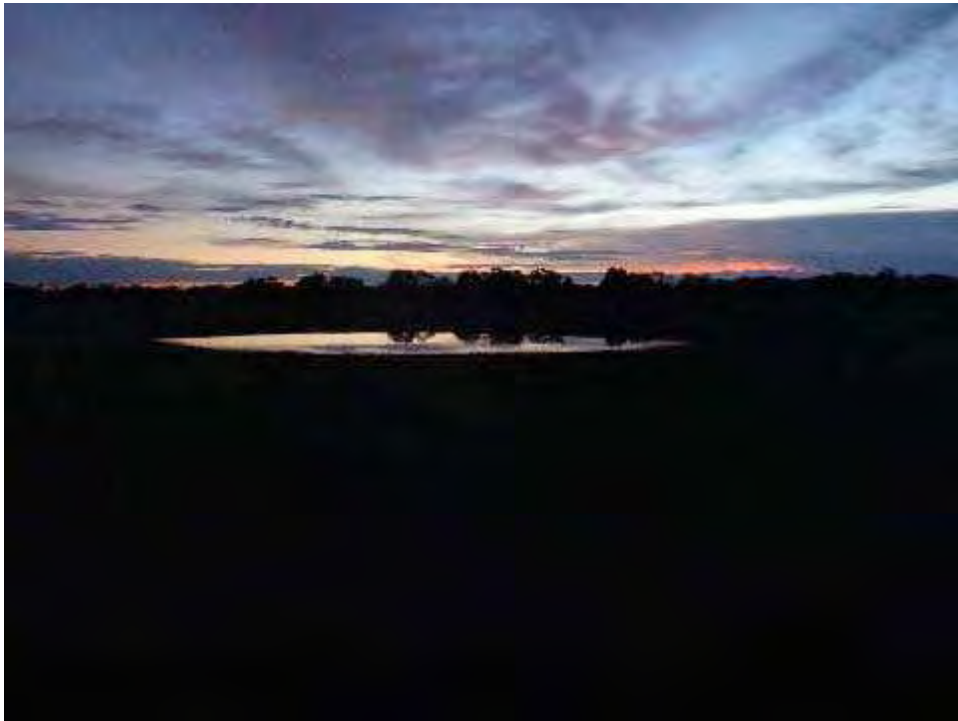


First spotting (besides many birds!) was a new antelope! It was a Tsessebe. And then a Steenbok!! The little one on the right!!



This Great White Heron was fabulous against the gray sunset sky! Saw more birds, grunting hippos & then back to the lodge for the going away celebration!!





Sunset in the Okavango Delta with Christmas decorations! Cool, huh?





After dinner, we headed to the Boma -what they called the campfire location where we'd celebrate our time at this camp & say goodbye! This one was a fenced circular area with a built in bar area.





So we all sat around the campfire & the staff began their fun singing & dancing entertainment.





But this time we knew how it was done & our group wasted no time in getting involved! Then we did our own dances & they were all very appreciative. After the "formal" part of the evening, we started giving some cha cha lessons to both Lindsey, the manager, Tinashe, our guide, & Wise, our driver guide. Great evening! Now we've danced 3 dances in Botswana!!

So that finishes up our last night in Botswana! Tomorrow we fly/drive/boat to Zambia!

Stay tuned for more excitement!!!

Lots of love,

Pam & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #15 (Okavango Delta, Botswana to Lufupa Camp, Zambia)
Date: 1/1/2015

Good Evening all my friends & family!!

This day had the most complicated travel on this trip! First we were up at 6:15am for packing & breakfast!



Funny seeing all our look alike luggage piled up waiting for loading onto the extra jeep! OAT provided us all with a duffel bags for the trip (limit was 44lbs per person -including any carry on's we had! At first we were panicky about that, but was actually pretty easy to stay within the guidelines!).



We got to the runway first & waited for our 2 planes to land. We stayed in the middle to watch for animals, then after the luggage was dropped off, that vehicle came down to the middle to watch & we drove up to the loading area.







On this leg, Marlyn & Michele and Ken & Sue rode in the little plane, while the rest of us were in the 12 seater.





It was a beautiful, clear warm day & the flight was uneventful & lovely!! After arriving back at Kasane, we boarded a bus & headed to the Zambian border.



After clearing Customs/Immigration in Botswana, we took a little "ferry" across the river into Zambia. Interesting place, where 4 countries meet in the middle of the intersection of 3 rivers! The

Chobe River meets up with the Zambezi River and ????. making a corner of Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, & Zimbabwe. I believe they said it was the only place in the world that this happens!



Can you see all the guys running to the boat? It is the Salesman of Zambia! They swarmed us! All young men & boys. We made our way to the bus through the mob (all smiling, but insistent!). On the bus Mr T said if we wanted to buy something, we could open the window & do the transaction through the window. I had been advised that this was an excellent spot to buy copper bracelets. Supposedly they make them themselves out of locally mined copper. All we different & as soon as you opened the window it was a literal swarm of hands & faces coming through!! I made my negotiations and bought several bracelets. Great fun & felt very secure since we were inside the bus! As soon as I finished, Mr T said to close the window. Then we heard these light tap tapings trying to get our attention, but politely! They were also selling carvings, bowls, supposedly everything hand made.



On past the border/customs station of Zambia. Must mention about the hundreds of trucks piled up at the border. Most didn't have a driver in them. Apparently they have trouble getting approvals from one country to the other without greasing palms at every border. Some of the big company's can get it done, but most struggle. Other issues due to the truck drivers spending several days to weeks in the little border stations -encouraging prostitutes to hang nearby also. They blame much of the spread of AIDS on the truck drivers. Sad situation due to the greed & corruption of the politicians.





We had a little lunch snack on the bus (they very rarely let us go 2 hours without pushing food at us!! And then we soon arrived in Livingstone -the Zambian Gateway to Victoria Falls. Since Zimbabwe is in such political uproar, most tourist fly into Livingstone to do their Victorian Falls vacation -although 3/4 of the Falls & by far the most beautiful is on the Zimbabwe side. Mr T laughingly told us that he was sure if there was anyway to move the Falls out of Zimbabwe -it would have been done!! Livingstone is named after Dr Livingstone, I presume fame & I speak more about him later. Truly an amazing man!! We were actually flying out of the Domestic terminal which was quite dingy & old. Since we had a half hour & there was no internet in this terminal, they suggested we make our way next door to the International Terminal.



That terminal was like an entirely different world! Huge, clean, AIR-CONDITIONED! & the internet was fast & steady! Got lots of email done in the 15/20 minute wait!





Again 2 planes & this time we flew in the little one with John & Connie & Tinashe -a British plane called an Islander. Seemed to be quite old, but the pilot (also British) was named John & Tinashe said he was THE BEST in the business. Good thing too, because it was a rather difficult flight. Not for John (or should I say John's -because John Hibner was the co-pilot!!







Almost missed the other passing by, but John turned around & asked if I'd like to see them again. I laughingly said yes, since I thought he was kidding, but he called ahead & asked them to slow down so that we could overtake them & let me get a better picture!! Really neat!







We saw a storm crossing our path & soon ran through it. Really hard rain & in total white out conditions, but John was calm as a cucumber & the plane was just as level & smooth as could be. Amazing!! Just love professionals!! Then it cleared up and we saw elephants on the north side of the Kafue River just before we saw our own camp down below. Exciting setting for the Lafupa Tent Camp on the confluence of the Kafue & Lafupa Rivers.





We landed light as a feather & found the others waiting for us. We hopped in a jeep with Sam, one of the 2 new guides. He was a riot! Truly a funny guy that not only loved to track game for us, but loved to tell jokes & kid around! Really loved him!!





Had a short drive from the airstrip to the camp, so they took us on a short game drive. First thing, we spotted the Southern Crested Crane, specifically indigenous to this area. Gorgeous big bird & very distinguished!! Then the guides spotted Blue Wildebeest in the distance & thought they'd drive us over to see them closer. Here they are allowed to drive off road if in pursuit of some of the larger game. Suddenly our jeep stopped & the guide pointed & said "Lions!" He was very excited! Then Mr T with the binoculars up to his eyes said "No, it's CHEETAHS!!!" Then we're off & running. They had known there were lions in this particular area & would not have been surprised to see them, but even the guide was excited about this Cheetah sighting.





There were 2 lying in the deep grass & one peering out of a nearby clump of grass & bush.







The 2 soon decided to wander over to be with the other. We watched them for quite a while, just gave us goose bumps!! They were totally unconcerned about our presence there. After 20 minutes or so, we decided we should head on to the camp & get checked in. So I'll close here & pick up the camp & rest of the day in the next one!

Hope you all had a marvelous New Year's!!! We're heading back to the states today & I'll try to get caught up enroute! Have 30 hours of travel time ahead of us!!

Lots of love,

Pam & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #16 (Lufupa Tent Camp, Zambia)

Date: 1/1/2015

Good Afternoon Everyone! Can't wait to get started again! Just as we think we seen it all, we see & experience something more! Truly our best vacation EVER!!





Our welcome to this park, Lufupa Tent Camp in Zambia, was the best yet!!! Such enthusiasm! Joyce even got to dance with Sam, our guide!!! Lots of wonderful drummers!!







The lodge was gorgeous. And of course they could not wait to start stuffing us with fabulous food & drink!!! And this was just our greeting snack!!!



After posing for pictures, our Staff Manager gave us our welcome briefing with the camp dos/don'ts. Pretty much the same as the others -no walking after dark alone, don't feed the wildlife, etc!!



And a bit more food!!!! The pizza was incredible!!!









We were assigned to Cabin #1 -it was a family cabin with 2 separate bedrooms and a huge sitting room with a humongous bar area (not stocked!!). We closed off the bedroom with the twin beds & used the king bed. The sitting room was perfect for our afternoon computer time!! The outside deck stretched the entire length of the 2 rooms. Wow!!





After a short break to unpack & get things settled, it was time for an evening drive.





We immediately started spotting animals. Velvet monkeys, various birds, & Puku! The Puku are similar to Impala, but you'll notice they don't have those adorable black markings on their rumps!



Got a great picture of the unusual Hammerkop. Isn't he something? I can see why such a distinguished character needs such a big home!!









Saw Impala, more Puku, some Reed buck, more birds, & suddenly there were our 3 Cheetah brothers again! They had moved a bit, but in the same general area, still just lazing around! We didn't stay out too long tonight. Figured it had been a long day & we needed to get a little rest for a full day tomorrow.

So that will do it for this one! Another full day in this park in the Jeep, then a day on the Rivers!! Hang on with us.

By the way, don't believe I've mentioned that I'm going to change my name! Everyone in the US calls me Pam or PAM-e-la. Here they all pronounce it Pa-MEL-a. I love it! Have started introducing myself as Pa-MEL-a!!

Lots of love,

Pamela & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #17 Lufupa Tent Camp, 2nd day morning)

Date: 1/2/2015

Good Morning Again!! Hope everyone is doing well! Can't believe it, but so far there's been no accidents & no one has gotten sick. Several of us have had a bout of diarrhea (sorry if that's TMI for some of you), but has only lasted a day or so & not caused any grief. Probably just from having such different things to eat & soooooooo much of it!! Soooo....on with the report!



First thing different was a spotting of this strange foam on the bush. Michele had actually seen it a couple of days ago, but none of the rest of us saw it. So now we all got to see! It's the egg nest of the Foam Nest Frog! They showed us the frog in a book, very non-descript (sorry Mr Frog), but the nest is certainly different. Apparently he/she usually lay the eggs in the foam over a water hole so that the tiny tadpoles will drop straight done into the water when they hatch!



And then a Water Scorpion???? Ick!!



Finally got a good picture of the ever present Helmeted Guinea Fowl (African Chicken!!). Never saw the Crested one unfortunately! Sue did when we were on our Rhino Hunt in Victoria Falls -but that's getting ahead of myself!!



These Puku were in the field with a Velvet Monkey! Too cute!! Got a good look at the Water Monitor waiting to ambush the unwary termites! Get em guy!!





And looky here! We found our Cheetah brothers again! Kept hoping we'd see them hunting, but no go. They were just too too lazy!!



Nice close up of the Crested Crane. Wow is it a beautiful big bird!!



And the Ground Hornbill.



And found the Blue Wildebeest we were looking for last night. Got really close to a large herd of them. They migrate north, so a good sighting to see so many of them together here! With some young ones!!



Most wildflowers were just starting to bloom. This is a Flame Lilly. It was quite lovely & the bright red really stood out in the green fields. There was another one -Fire? The others saw it between cabins 3 & 4, but I never got down there to see it!!



Quite an interesting Millipede!!



And there were several kinds of lizards both in the lodge & in the cabins!!! Liked having them around, figure they were helping with the bug population!!







Back for lunch, they fixed omelets & man were they good!!! Then enjoyed our 10 toes up

Discovery time! Another lovely morning!!

Enough for now!

Lots of love,

Pam & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #18 (Lufupa Tent Camp, 2nd Day -Evening drive)
Date: 1/2/2015
Hello Everyone!

We enjoyed our couple of hours to relax & computer and then met for "High Tea" & our evening drive! This time we even get to Spotlight! That's a new experience!! So on with the show!!



First I'd like to point out that there was a Hippo convention right across from the lodge through out most of the day (& sounded like night too!!). Usually 10 or so in a shallow spot directly across the Lufupa River. They played & splashed & grunted & wallowed very vigorously most of the time. Very entertaining!!! Although we couldn't see that spot from our cabin, we could hear their grunting & splashing most of the time, even in the night.



We loaded up again. By the way, the jeeps (I'm calling them that generically -they really weren't jeeps!!) were slightly different at each camp. Didn't like these as much, not much difference in height in the 3 rows & those on the back were dangling their feet. However these were much quieter, so we did like that. And they had nice wooden arm rests which were good too, but mostly you couldn't use them as the bushes are quite tight to the edge of the trails & you'd get constantly brushed by the leaves & branches if your arms were too far out on the edge. The jeeps (Land Rovers) at the first camp in Chobe had seat belts, but none of the others did. Wish there were seat belts! Sometimes you were really bouncing around & holding binoculars in one hand & a camera in the other. Oh and another thing before we left, my brother had loaned me his binoculars because OAT had advised that everyone should have their own. That was very true & the extra set really came in handy (and they were a little better than the pair we had!! Thanks Dan!).



We usually stopped to gaze over this huge grassy plain several times during the drive. There were always animals & birds out there, but a lot of them long distance. Once our guide (this time we were with Victor -a 20 year veteran with Wilderness Camps that was used as "vacation relief" and

usually traveled to a different park every 3 months) had spotted something, he would then head in that direction to get closer. Or else we'd just take off to another location in the park that he wanted us to check out



Also Ken spotted a different kind of antelope. It was the Defossa Water Buck. Good job Ken!!



Victor hopped out of the jeep to show us these huge hanging vines. He said if he was just going out in the bush, he would never carry water. He would depend on these vines which are hollow inside and can be cut & water drains out of them. He didn't cut any of these, he said they weren't quite big enough, but would still have water in them.



We saw lots more Puku, Impala, Many many birds, but nothing terribly exciting. Stopped with the other group for a "Sundowner," drinks in a pleasant spot for sundown!



Sam had but down a particularly big seed pod from a Sausage tree and had the boys line up for a picture. Boys will certainly always be boys! And Sam was very encouraging! Nuff said!







This particular watering hole had hippos, both in and out of the water, an Ahinga drying it's wings in a nearby tree, & lots of birds on the other shore with floating crocodile inbetween! Not to mention a very nice outdoor toilet!!! Discovered that "marking your territory" in the great outdoors together is quite a bonding experience! Mr T had also brought Mopane worms -a local delicacy. Ick. I believe we all tried them. Can't believe I didn't take a picture! They were black & about 1 1/2" long. Really a caterpillar. I did eat one -very very very chewy -it just would not go away. I personally don't recommend them, but Mr T loved them!



The spotlighting experience was quite interesting! First off it meant that you were out on the trails in the dark. And in the dark in the bush is really really in the dark! The driver/guide would both drive & hold a spot light that he would sweep from side to side as we drove down the trail -at a pretty pert clip I might add. My camera was not good enough to really get a picture of anything we saw, but at one stop, he had found several Bush Babies jumping from branch to branch. We could see them quite clearly -hope that Ken got some pictures. They are tiny little squirrel like creatures with no tail and big heads with huge big luminous eyes. They put on quite a show for us -springing about 3 to 4 feet effortlessly from branch to branch. Just precious! Had seen them on National Geo, but never occurred to me that we might see them in the wild! Also saw a type of rabbit bounding away -think it was a Spring Hare, but don't have my book available to check for sure!

We made it back for a rather later dinner & then straight to bed! Just after we all got to our rooms, there was a HUGE rain storm with heavy winds & lots of lightning. It lasted about an hour. Thought we were going to blow away for sure! But George & I were both snug in our

comfy King size bed with a really good mosquito netting and he watched movies & I read while it just whipped & blew all around us! Cooled things down considerably too. Didn't have to use the fans at all. It was very comfy!

Sooooo....enough for this. Tomorrow we get to safari by boat both morning & afternoon!!

More later!

Lots of love,

Pamela & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #19 (Lufupa Tent Camp -River Safari morning)

Date: 1/2/2015

Good Morning Friends & Family,

This was a very exciting & entertaining day, so I'll get straight into it! First off, it was amazingly lucky that the storm blew through last night -first because it was after we were all snug in our Tent cabins AND because today we are to spend all day on the rivers and don't have to navigate the wet trails! We have been so very lucky this entire trip with both animal sightings and the weather! I had feared that it would be really really hot, muggy & lots of rain showers, but so far, there was only one day that it rained during the day and that was the first day of the first camp & only the last 20 minutes of the trip back to camp, so we had just covered up with the ponchos that are always in the Jeeps and since we were already on the main road, there was no issues at all. Otherwise, it has rained a couple of times during the night while we were sleeping, but never while we were trying to safari! And the temps have been very pleasant. Just hot enough that we don't get chilled from driving in the open vehicles, but never hot enough that we were uncomfortable. It's really been amazing! And no trouble with bugs while we're doing our daily animal hunts either. Some bugs at night, but the mosquito netting took care of that. Anyway, we feel like we've been charmed!!









So after our 7am breakfast (got to sleep in a little!!), we trooped down the hill to the rivers edge to load in the boats. We had been given a choice of River Safari or Fishing. John, Connie, Janie, Marlyn, Mr T & Sandy took out the fishing boat & the rest of us went with Sam on the barge.





Sam gave us all life jackets & a safety briefing. The view of the lodge & our cabin was very nice from the river!





We got really close to the hippos. Sam had warned us that they would sometimes swim (they actually walk on the bottom) under the boat & might accidentally bump it, but not to worry about it! We sometimes saw bubbles coming towards us, but never felt anything.



As we turned to head up the Lufupa River, we passed by the Fishermen. John had already been successful and you'll notice Tinashe emphasizing the size of his first catch!!



We got some great close ups of the Anhinga (African Darter) as it dried its wings.





The top 2 pictures are the Shallow's Touracotte (I know the 2nd one is poor, but you can see the flash of red on it's wings as it was flying off). Then just birds, birds, birds. Loved it. Could very easily become a birder -if I had someone there giving me the ID's!!!











The parade of birds continued -African Finfoot -also called a Snake bird because when he swims, his body is very low in the water & his head resembles a snake. The the White Faced Whistling Duck that once came to visit us in Texas! A pair stopped overnight in their migration & amused us with their calls -we had hoped they would stay, but they continued to wherever they had been heading!. There was Black Backed Barbets, a lovely Malakite Kingfisher, and a fabulous Goliath Heron that stalked around eating frogs as we watched! There were Pied Wagtails, Open Billed Storks, & some other Kingfishers too. Several types of Eagles were in distant flight, but couldn't get any pictures -Brown Snake Eagle & Tawny Eagle. How he could tell the difference from such long distance was mind boggling to me. There is a crocodile low in the water in the grasses by the Whistling Ducks, but my camera couldn't capture him. Use your imagination!!! Kept thinking we might see him strike when the Goliath Heron was stalking by, but never got that lucky!!



The most fun was watching the Golden Weaver. The tree over the water was just full of them & we sat for a bit watching & listening. They were right by the water's edge & we could watch both them & the Goliath Heron & the Whistling Duck (with some Egyptian Geese in there too).



Continuing on up the river, we spotted a beautiful Fish Eagle spying out the land! Such a marvelous specimen of a raptor!



Eventually turned back & slowly returned to pass by our Fishermen once again. Turns out that they had all caught at least one, but John had bested them all in both number & size! King of the Lufupa Fishermen!!



Caught both the Anhinga & the Finfoot in the water. The Finfoot reminds me a lot of what the Loon looks like in the water.



Allowed the fishermen to pass us by & dock first. After all, they were working much harder than we were!!



Their haul was quite impressive in the bucket! Glad the staff will take care of cleaning them -none of us have to lift a finger for the dirty work!!



Back to our cabins after lunch, I got a photo of this adorable little frog that was enjoying the sun on the glass door!! He was a real cutie! I nudged him a bit to see if he was willing to move, but he just sticky toed it about a half inch & settled back down! Left him be, figured he could eat some mosquitos! Speaking of mosquitos, we were all taking malaria pills, but hadn't seen hardly any mosquitos or any other bugs while we were either in the jeeps or on the boat. Mr T did warn us that Zambia was teestie fly trritory, so we all slathered on 100% Deet for a couple of days, but other than that, haven't had to wear insect repellent or even sunscreen, since we were under cover in the Jeep. It's really been quite wonderful. The Teestie flies were ferocious and got any bit of bare skin they could find -discovered that they werre particularly attracked to black (Mr T said it reminded them of Cape Buffalo skin!), so learned not to wear black socks!!! But they weren't out on the water thank goodness!

Enough for this one! Had one more evening left in Zambia! Party night!!

Lots of love,

Pamela & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #20 (Lufupa Tent Camp, Evening River Safari)
Date: 1/2/2015
Hello Everyone,

Thanks for joining us for our last night in Zambia! After our 10 toes up Discovery break, we met back at the Lodge for a talk by Sandy about the history of Zambia. I must have forgotten to take any pictures! It was a wonderful talk, gave us a touch of information about the politics (they are democratic & will vote in January for a new president -their most recent one had just died of natural causes in September and they have an acting one), when they got their freedom (used to be Rhodesia?, I think!!), how their schooling works (free, but must pay for uniforms & materials which is quite expensive), all quite interesting. As I mentioned before, I'm amazed that the guides can also be such professional & knowledgeable speakers! Then we all loaded back up for the Evening Safari. This time we were heading up the Kafue River. It is a much deeper wider river, but the only change that made was that we mostly concentrated on one side at a time.





Diana decided to take the afternoon off so got a photo as we slid out in the river. Only John, Mr T & Sandy went out fishing this afternoon. We sat in the boat a bit waiting for Sam. Turns out he had taken a drive down the trail to clear out some trees that the elephants had pushed across the road last night!!! Wanted the way clear for us to head back to the air strip tomorrow morning!



Lots of the cattle Egret like we have all over the US were perched in the bushes.







Again there were many many birds, but my little point & shoot was not doing a good job capturing the beauty, so I'll not post most of them. The sunset was absolutely gorgeous though! We even saw some Puku on the shore, but again, didn't get any good pictures! And a nice size crocodile on the shore! Just a little too dark for my camera to get it!





Sam had brought all our Sundowner supplies, so we had a drink out on the water. It was a beautiful setting, relaxing & fun!





The Hippos of course were all around us, quite noisy & boisterous. How many folks can say they had a glass of wine on the Kafue River with Hippos grunting & grumbling & splashing near by???? He pointed out a Hippo path where they climb up out of the water to graze & move to other watering holes. Each big male has his own trail. The females come & go as they please. These trails actually change the landscape because they become so deep, they actually connect the river to other water routes.



Not a terribly exciting afternoon, but very pleasant & relaxing. That's not such a bad thing after 10 days of non-stop excitement!!



The fishermen had done even better this evening! Amazing catch!!!



The evening meal was lovely as usual & then we gathered around for our usual last night Boma! Each camp does their own thing and this one had prepared to drum their way into our hearts! They actually tuned up the bigger drums using the fire! Pretty interesting! never seen anything like that! Then they gave us all a drum and let us follow along as they set us a rhythm! Got us to competing against each other. Too fun!! Blast it! Didn't get a picture because of was too busy playing my drum! That was great fun!!!







Then they sang & danced for us. Even Sam & Sandy took a turn!! Once again, we danced for them too -did Hippo for Christmas & Dolittle Cha. As the other camps were, they were suitably impressed. Said most Americans did nothing or sang You Are My Sunshine!! Too funny! They yelled out America's Got Talent for us!! The sky was totally clear so Tinashe did a talk on the Stars. Unfortunately the Southern Cross is not visible this time of year, but he pointed out all the other constellations -Milky Way, Orian's Belt, etc. He had a really really cool laser pointer that just split the sky! Things wound down quickly and we were soon back in our cabins preparing for an early morning travel day to Zimbabwe! Did relax a bit in our huge King bed! And so ended another Safari visit!

Only one more Tent Camp Safari! Can't believe it's winding down!!

Lots of love,

Pamela & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #21 (Travel from Zambia to Zimbabwe)

Date: 1/3/2015

Good Afternoon Everyone,

Trying to get caught up on the adventure! We're now sitting in the Denver Airport waiting on our last flight to get back to our RV in Mesa! Long long travel day! Already seeming like we never went! What an adventure!! Okay, so let's get back to it!!



Left about 6:30am to make our way back to the airstrip. Didn't see much enroute, but it was a beautiful morning!



Marlyn & Michele & John & Connie & Tinashe took the little jet & the rest of us took the bigger plane. We're all old hands at this now! And this is our last small plane flight.



Saw a herd of zebra as we took off!





Mostly clear, but some clouds on the flight back to Livingstone. Lovely scenery. Saw the mists from Victoria Falls as we landed. Another Maribou Stork on the runway! They must really like the concrete!!



Saw this crazy statute on the way out of the airport. Reminds us of the Road Runner in Las Cruces! Made of recycle stuff, but not sure what it is? Termite???



Drove over the bridge from Zambia to Zimbabwe & got a little view of the Zambian side of Victoria Falls. Not much water there yet!



On into the city & made a short stop at the Sprayview Hotel where we'll be staying in a couple of days. Just to use the toilet & give us a few minutes to send emails.





Only an hour and a half drive to Hwange National Park. Past a roadside market stand & through the coal mine area & on to the park. Transferred to our regular Safari jeeps at the gate to the park.







And then another half hour on to our Kashawe Tent Camp. Started looking like it wanted to rain & actually spit a bit. Mustafe wanted to stop & get out the ponchos, but we convinced him we would rather just keep going. By the time he stopped & then restarted, it had already quit. The scenery is really different here. Lots of mountains! Saw some elephants a ways off the road & in the brush. Too much brush to get a photo, but we knew for sure we were going to see animals!!



So this is our last real Safari location. It's on Zimbabwe's western border and is it's largest game reserve. There are private concessions on the edge, so there could be more people around. We've certainly gotten used to not seeing a soul besides us in our safari locations!!!



We got really tickled because they apologized because in this camp they are not allowed to drive off road! Can you see the trail in front of the jeep? It's not only really rough, but very steep downhill! We were not particularly upset that they couldn't give us an "off road" experience here!!!





As usual, the staff was there to greet us! It's sure easy to get used to this special treatment! This camp had gone to great lengths to set us a beautiful table. Turns out that all the special little table decorations (including the place mats) are all made by the camp staff & for sale in their gift store! Too cool!







We made ourselves comfortable in the new lodge, checked out the view from our 3000' elevation & got our cabin assignments. They had even put little Elephant towel decorations on our beds! George & I had a beautiful view from our deck -could see a herd of Impala way way down below!! Could just see a little water in the river -they said it had been totally dry just 2 weeks ago!





Another beautiful tented cabin. If this isn't roughing it comfortably, not sure what is!!! They gave us a short break & then back to the lodge for our evening safari! I'll get back with you shortly!!
Lots of love,

Pam & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #22 (Kashawe 1st Evening Safari)
Date: 1/3/2015
Good Evening Everyone,

We'll continue with our first Evening Safari in the Zimbabwe Tent Camp, Kashawe in Hwange NP. Beautiful area & so totally different from the others. Very mountainous region.



First stop was a lovely Viewpoint. Everyone got out their binoculars for a quick scan for wildlife down below! Saw several groups of elephants, too far away for us to head towards them.



Then went to check out a report of a sighting of 3 male lions. Sure enough -immediately found 2 of them. Remember -I have practically no zoom!







We watched their very house cat like behavior for quite a while. They were yawning, stretching, snuggling with each other & calmly snoozing.







After a bit, the 3rd guy came casually walking up to join the other 2. Speculation that he was a younger lion that had just joined up with the 2 brothers. He appeared a bit younger & scrawnier (isn't that a relative term! Cannot believe we were that close to the King of the Jungle!

And with that -can I share a joke? The King of the Jungle -Mr Lion walked up to a Baboon & asked "who's the King of the Jungle?" "Why you Mr Loin of course!!" Then he walked up to a Zebra & asked "who's the King of the Jungle?" "No question -it's you oh Mighty Mr Lion!!" Then he walked up to the Elephant & asked "who's the King of the Jungle?" The elephant picked him up, shook him up & down, threw him on the ground & stomped on him a bit for good measure. The Lion got up, shook himself off and said "Geez.....if you don't know the answer to the question, why didn't you just say so???"



We decided to go look for some Elephants!!! Ha!



Took a left turn & drove up the hill a little ways & Sue sang out "Elephants!!" Sure enough just behind us was a herd of Elephants browsing their way up the hill. Mafuka, our guide called Victor in the other Jeep & advised them of the location. By the time they got there, most of the Elephants were out of sight.



They talked a bit & then we both set off back down the hill & then turned left again to go up the hill on the other side. Only about 5 minutes ride.



Then we could see them up ahead starting to come across the road in front of us.







Soon they were on all sides of us, note the adorable little one!!!





In front of us, we realized that several Elephants were coming down the road and almost ran right into the other Jeep!!!!!! Apparently they never even realized the Jeep was there until they were on top of it. Our guide was reminding us that they have very poor eyesight, so they probably didn't even notice them until they were about to run into it!





We watched them for quite a while until it started getting too dark to really see them. Amazing how many different size derrieres there really are out there!!!





We made another pass by the Lions on our way back to camp. Gave me goose bumps at how close we got in the Jeep on our pause on the way by. Seriously he was only about 3' away. And I was on the outside edge. Whooooeee!!! Nice kitty. What a way to finish up our first day in this camp! Can't get any better than this!!!

More to come!

Lots of love,

Pamela & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #23 (Kashawe 2nd Day, Morning Safari)
Date: 1/3/2015
Hi Guys,
Lets get to it!!!



Didn't spot anything down below when we stepped out to head to breakfast at 6:30am!! But what a view! Couldn't wait to start the Safari this morning! We were all pumped up from last nights sightings!! Could certainly get hooked on the excitement of the hunt!!!



Finally managed a picture of the Dwarf Mongoose. Had seen it lots of times, but it was always too quick to get a photo!!!



Got a cool picture of the HooPoe! It was a really gorgeous bird. Lucky sighting -had been hearing it a lot! It flew down to the ground & got another shot, but it was further away. Bet the zoom guys got some really awesome pictures!!



The guides always gave us info on the vegetation all around us too. Mostly I have left that out because this was turning into an encyclopedia, but couldn't resist this. Had been noticing these brown leaves & were puzzled because it was the tips that were brown. We're used to seeing the new leaves come out in a lovely pale green, but apparently in Africa because there are soooooo many browsing animals, even the bushes have a protection system! The new leaves come out BROWN to try & make themselves look unappetizing so they have a chance to grow! How's that for some cool stuff??? Also, the plants develop a bitter tannin when too much has been bitten off, so most of the browsers only bite once from each plant, then move on! Just AMAZING!



I know I've shown you lots of Giraffe, but this one was just soooooooo cute. Made me want to go shopping for Toys!! I know -you are bored with Impala! But they really are just the cutest sweetest always there dependable creatures!



Drove into the nearby Sinamatela Camp. It's a public camp near the border of Hwange NP. Our camp pays for the entrance fee for this one also. Had this gorgeous view from the back of their restaurant. Apparently you can rent cabins here for about \$75 per night. They have cooking facilities, electricity & running water, but look pretty bare. Again we could see Elephant in the distance. Just to remind you they are there!!



Big Warthog with HUGE double tusks blocked our way on the road! He huffed & ran as we got closer.



Gorgeous example of a Marula Tree. It's fruit is used to make the South African liquor called Amarula. Yummy Yummy! More about it later!



These huge Army ants were after something. They are nearly a half inch long! Can't imagine their bite!! Steered clear of them!



Using this photo as a 3-fer! There are 2 Francolin's (also called Spur Fowl -very very common, I think I've mentioned before about their baboon like noises), a Leopard tortoise & a African Grey Hornbill.



Just another example of the "roads" we were following around the park!!



I think this was my best picture of the Pied Kingfisher. Other than hummingbirds, I think all the Kingfishers are my favorite. Awesome to watch diving for fish!



How's this for a blue sky!!!!!! I think that's one of the Kite's, but couldn't promise!



Lots of mud puddles for us to splash through. Never needed the snorkel thank goodness!!





Victor showed us how to make rope out of the bark from the Mopane Tree. Remember this is also the tree that provides a home for the Mopane worms that they sooooo enjoy eating! What a multipurpose tree! Note that he said you couldn't roll it on your legs if you had any hair on them!! Ha!



A Candelabra Tree. Looks like a cactus, but it's really a tree. They didn't mention it, but when I was reading about it on line, says that the sap is poisonous and just a drop of it on your skin causes a blister and if it happened to get in your eye, it could blind you! Makes a good hedge or fence because the animals avoid it!



A beautiful Camel Thorn tree, with lots of White browed Sparrowweaver's nests & the Sparrowweaver him or herself in the upper left of the tree. Interesting fact about them, they generally only build their nests on the west side of the tree, to protect themselves from the prevailing winds. However, we did spot one tree where the birds were obviously directionally challenged because the nests were 360 around it!!



Heading to the picnic area at the Dam & Victor decided to show us the backside first -but alas, the road was blocked! Not to worry, he easily made a 3 point turn with only a short drive into the water! Crap! My heart was in my throat!!





On around to meet with everyone else. Time for Morning tea! This getting on the road before 7am sure makes the morning long! Can't believe how much gets done before noon!!! Now I understand how so many of our Mesa dancers accomplish so much.....and there we are just sleeping!





So Marlyn found these little guys. Working really hard together to push their little ball of dung up a vertical wall! Why we may ask???? Unknown, I guess they thought there wouldn't be any more dung on the topside? Unfortunately they did not accomplish the task, got to about 3" from the top & fell back to the bottom! So sorry little fellows! And by the way, the dung they happen to be rolling is from a Rock Hyrax public toilet. I thought I'd gotten a picture, but don't seem to have it. Anyway, the Rock Hyrax is a marmot like creature that we could just see playing on the rocks in the bushes. Couldn't get a decent picture, but I have some later that I'll share. According to Mr T, they are fastidious little guys and they all potty in the same spot, so there was a HUGE pile of little quarter inch pellets just outside the wall of one of the overlooks. By the way, these guys are tiny little dung beetles. Makes me wonder -are there Elephant Dung beetles and Rock Hyrax Dung beetles? Have to research that.



There are 2 crocodile on the left tip of that little peninsula of green sticking out. I think our zoomers got good pictures of them. That brings me to another little fact of interest. This National Park was developed due to the inspiration of a 22 year old young man back in 1928. He came up with the idea of damming a couple of rivers & actually put in wells to pump water & make watering holes to bring in the animals! Thank goodness for far sighted individuals like him!!





On the way back to camp, I spotted this spot of bright orange & asked what kind of plant it was. Victor stopped to look and strangely enough it hopped out of the jeep & pulled it up and kept it. Turns out it was something he had never seen. He took it back to camp to find out about it. Could never find anyone that had ever seen it before, so I've suggested they call it the Pa Mel a plant! I've left me mark!! Ha Ha!!



A better view of the steep downhill to the camp. Saw more Warty's on the way back, but no good picture. Great lunch, but figure I'd better cover that in another Travelogue. This one has gotten really really long winded! Have to apologize, now that we're home, I can spend more time being accurate, but that makes me more wordy! Sorry!

Hang in there, we're down to the last week of our Great Adventure!!!

Lots of love,

Pamela & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #24 (Kashawe, Afternoon/Evening)

Date: 1/4/2015

And Hello Again!

Getting more & more excited about the trip as I retell it! You can't even imagine how wonderful it was. Let me tell you more!!





We got back for lunch & they had decorated for Christmas! We all (at least the ladies & a couple of the men -not George!!) decided we needed to go shopping in the gift store!



These little "Christmas ornaments" are carved from what they call Vegetable Ivory. It is the seeds of some of the Palm Trees. It is so named because when the hard brown covering is carved off, it greatly resembles Elephant Ivory tusks. The staff had carved all sorts of animals onto the little balls.





Mafuka was manning the Gift shop when we all went in. He even posed with one of his personally carved pieces! There were shelves full of all kinds of hand made items. Each shelf had a label to let you know which staff member had made the products. Really neat! Could have spent a bunch, but tried to control myself! Not much room in the RV after all!! It rained during our afternoon 10 toes up Discovery time & stopped before it was time to head back for High Tea. The rain has certainly been conveniently timed!



Amazing how anxious everyone is for their snacks! After all, we need to eat every 2 hours, right? Yipes!!!



Thought I should share a photo of Sue's "Flying Nun" hat! It was especially nice when the breeze was blowing it back!!



Victor stopped to show us a Warthog den. He said they would back into the hole so that their heads were poking out and they could easily escape.





Got really close to a nice healthy herd of Wildebeest. Several adorable babies in this food chain!



Saw lots of the Leopard Tortoise. Even saw some mating! Such a difficult task for them!!



Always anxious to help build our knowledge base, Victor stepped out of the jeep to grab a tortoise & show us how to tell if it was male or female! Females are generally larger & their stomachs are convex (for holding eggs). Also they are rather flat ended with short tails. I don't think I'll have a use for this knowledge!!



Back up at a different view point at Sinamatella, we again saw Elephants below us!





We had all converged for a beautiful Sundowner. And it's Christmas Eve! Janie celebrates with a 2 handed toast (Walt? don't you want your drink?)!!



Tried again for the Rock Hyrax, but don't despair! I'll get a good picture soon!!



Walt & Janie were getting all cuddly for Christmas Eve. Nope, guess she was just trying to peer through his binoculars on a short leash! Come on Walt -you can share -after all, she got you a drink!!



The cactus seemed out of place, but after all, this is truly the edge of the Kalahari Desert!



All the women posed with Mufuka. Sue had discovered the night before that he had 3 wives! That brought on a long discussion about Zimbabwe's marriage policies. When a man marries -first off he has to have an intermediary request permission for him and negotiate a price for the dowry to pay her parents. Then when he applies for a license, he has to specify if it's for a 1 man, 1 woman marriage or if it is for a marriage with multiple wives. Currently a man can only have 5 wives although in past history there was really no limit. None of the other men at the camp had multiple wives. It is really not so common any more. The other thing that was different about Mafuka is that he only has one home for all his wives. Generally a man has a home for each wife because they don't get along. He must be very lucky!!! And yes, he does have to pay a dowry for each wife! No discount for multiples! On a strange note, Mr T told us that recently there had been several cases where a couple got married and the husband had not completely paid off the dowry (it was common to pay it in annual payments) before the wife died. In that case, the family had held the body and would not allow it to be buried until the dowry was paid!!! One girl's body was held in the mortuary under ice for over a year!!! According to Mr T, the husband was considered a real "dead beat."



Mafuka was a really sweet man and Sue was quite taken with him! Watch out Ken!!!



Janie was in a really fine mood this afternoon. Not that she wasn't regularly happy. As a matter of fact, she was always there to depend on giving us all a smile!



Michele was always doing some research and found the most amazing things!!! Thanks Michele!!



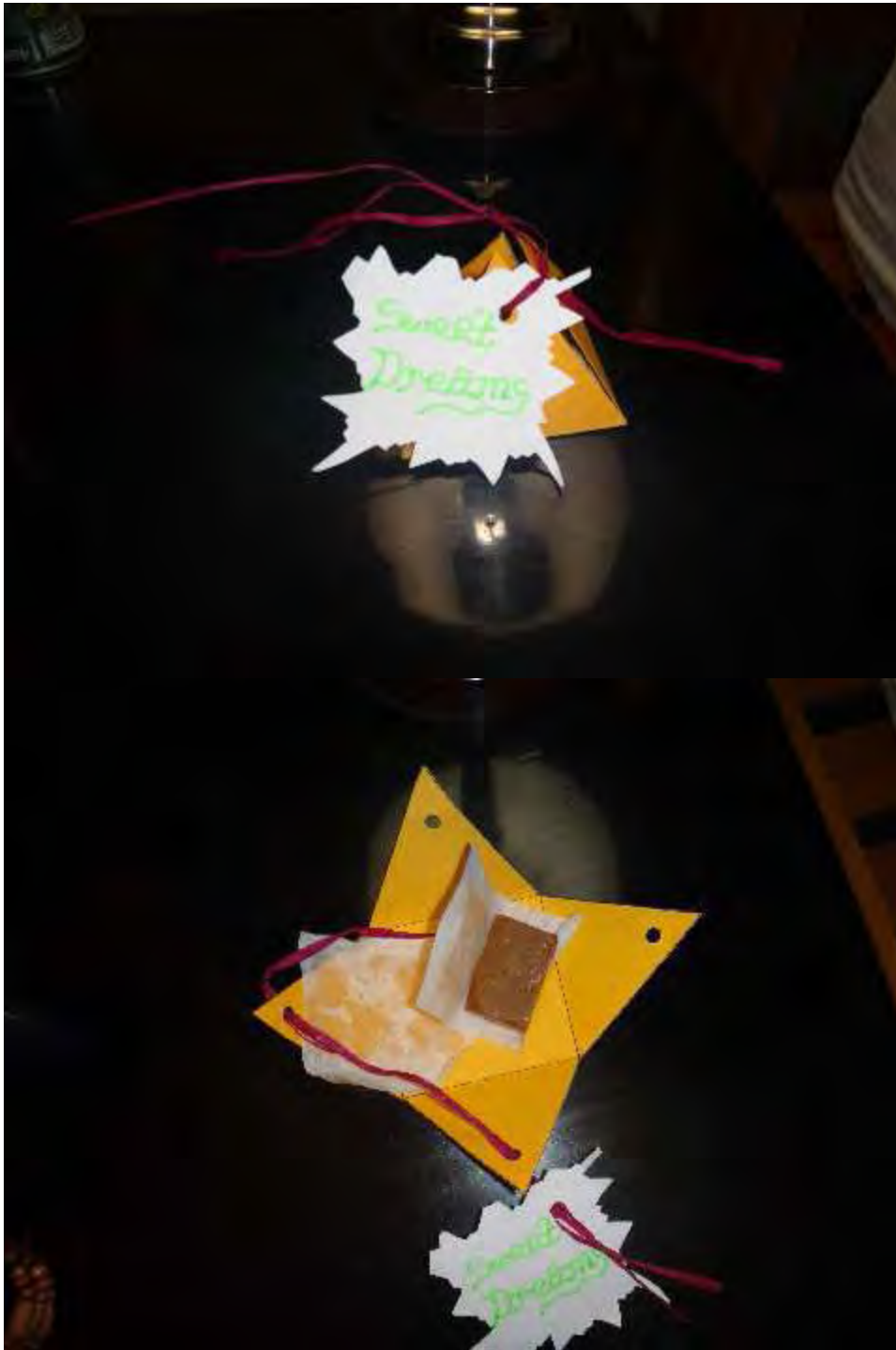
Connie & Michele were wishing George a Merry Christmas, but I caught them in the act!



We had a wonderful Christmas Eve dinner -can't remember what it was, but doesn't it look good?



We all sang Christmas Carols as the armed guards walked us to our cabins! They thought that was really funny! We had a ball!!!



When we got to our cabins, we had a gift from the Tent Camp Staff -yummy caramel -home made just for us!!!

Merry Christmas to all & to all a good night! We all went to sleep thinking about tomorrow's Discovery visit to a market place & then the homestead of Mr & Mrs Impala!

More soon!!

Lots of love,

Pamela & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #25 (Hwange Christmas -preparation)

Date: 1/4/2015

Good Morning Friends & Family,

This is a description of our Christmas Day. Wow! What a totally different day. I'd like to explain that in general Zimbabwe (& Botswana & Zambia) is overwhelmingly Christian. Mostly due to the ministry of Dr Livingstone so many years ago. (one guide told us honestly that even though his family was Christian, they sometimes incorporated some of their historical religious beliefs too JUST IN CASE! To cover the bases so to speak!! Ha Ha!!!) So in general they celebrate Christmas as we do in the US. So, it's a time for family & giving & sharing of love. OAT has decided for the past couple of years to ask a local family to host the visiting group with a day in their "home" and let them help with preparing the meal & enjoying "a day in the life of an average family." Now in our case, it happened that the regularly scheduled day fell on Christmas. So they asked the family if they still wanted to host as they had several times. They overwhelmingly said yes, which touched us and made us feel quite special. Our guide, Tinashe, assured us that it was a real & honest request to share with us their lives & find out more about us as people too. He also warned us that although he did not pay the family in any way, because OAT brought & furnished all the things required for the meal, more & more relatives & neighbors had begun to show up to share in the food & the festivities of having American guests! Okay! Enough talk -on with the day!



Mr T had let us sleep in -Breakfast was not until 7:30am!! So we were up at 6:30am to get prepared. The view from our deck was lovely as usual. There were several little squirrels playing in the tree to the left, but they don't show up in the picture. No rain last night, but it was clear & probably in the low 60's when we stepped out to head to breakfast.



Joyce had given us all a little stocking by our plates with gifts! Mine was the Hippo that I had been asking for since before we left Mesa!!! I wanta Hippo for Christmas -la di da di da!! Our regular breakfast was served: regular & fruit yogurt, lots of cut fresh fruit, choices of cereal, porridge, & toast (really good homemade bread!!). & lots of coffee of course. They used a French press.



We loaded up in the Jeeps to head to the entrance of the Hwange National Park (about a half hour) to get our bus (Victor was going to drive the bus too) to take us to the Coal Mining town of Hwange. We had all dressed in a bit brighter colors in honor of Christmas!



Spotted a giraffe in the trees, but he didn't want to come out & say Merry Christmas to us! The other group spotted another Tower of Giraffe, but they were quite a distance also. I'll save my picture space! But we did watch them for a bit.



Stopped for a White Backed Vulture & while folks were looking at that -I saw another huge bird in a distant tree. Turned out it was a Lappetfaced Vulture, the only other species of vulture that we saw on the trip! Hopefully Ken or Mike got a real picture of it!



Then I made my only really significant sighting of the trip. Caught this little antelope looking at me as we flew past (we were on a schedule for our trip & had already stopped a couple of times) and I insisted we stop & go back! When Victor saw what I had spotted, he was thrilled. It was a Cliff Springer. An antelope that lives in the rocks of the mountainsides & can "spring" from rock to rock effortlessly. Sure enough, after we stopped, he sprang up to another rock & there was another one. We spent an enjoyable couple of minutes watching them ping pong from rock to rock to rock. Very sure footed & precious to watch!!



Then just as we were leaving the park, Mafuka stood up to give a little talk about marriage & what it meant to him with his 3 wives. So everyone was looking forward at him. I happened to catch movement to my right and saw this big elephant right by the side of the road. (My day to catch things I guess!!). I hollered out Elephant & Victor obligingly stopped & backed up for a closer view!





He ended up putting on quite a show. I made a video that I'll get on Shutterfly in the next couple of days. Turns out that he was a male in "musk" apparently and was in a really foul mood! You can see little rivulets of dark liquid running down the side of his cheeks. That happens when they are ready to mate. Anyway, luckily we were in the bus rather than the jeep and there was a little creek between us & him. He shook his head, trumpeted, dug holes in the dirt & ripped the little trees up all around him! Even gave us a couple of mock charges! Really cool to watch. When we left Mafuka said to watch him and sure enough he ran after us shaking that huge head & flapping his ears. As if to say -"see, I chased them off!!!" A really really neat Christmas present for us all! Hopefully he found a mate to help his mood -he was no where to be seen when we came back by in the evening!





I'll skip the rest of the drive through the coal mining area & the tiny town of Hwange. It was

interesting, but hard to see much in my pictures from the bus. So here's the set up. OAT had provided Mr T with funds to purchase the makings of our meal with the Hwange family. He gave 5 of us girls a dollar (I think someone had 2 assignments? Can't remember who) and told us to walk around the market & find what he had assigned us & buy a dollar's worth of that product. We were not to take pictures of anyone unless they gave specific permission. Some of them still believe it's bad "gugu" to let your soul be captured in a box like that! My assignment was peanuts, which was a really simple one. The booth was easily visible in front & there was a pleasant young woman manning the stand. I approached her and at first she was rather shy about talking to me. She only had 2 things in her stand for sale. One was easily identifiable as peanuts, the other was a pea/bean type of item. Before I purchased me peanuts, I was asking her about them. She called over first a young man, then another woman for them to talk to me, but both just shook their heads. Finally the young man agreed to talk & started describing that the other item would be cooked with meat. So I was pretty sure they were like black eyed peas!! Mr T came over & confirmed! Cool! Anyway as we chatted, she got more & more comfortable talking to me. I asked about a picture & at first she said no, but then soon, she said yes and when I took it & showed her, she was very happy with it. Then I asked if she would pose with me and she was excited to do that. Wish I could have left her a copy some way. By the way, she said she did not grow these items, she went to a rural market and bought 25 pounds of each and brought them back to sell them at a small profit. We only had a few minutes there and we all had pretty much the same experiences. One had to buy Mopane worms! Yikes! That took some help, but they finally found a suitable substitute (George said later that they were actually a little better than the first ones we tried -but I didn't try them this time -CHICKEN!!!!!!). Diana had to find dried vegetables which turns out to actually be dried leaves, like pumpkin or spinach. Connie was told to find meat pieces, but ended up with dried soy -I think we were all rather pleased with that!!! I think Michele had to buy mangos? Can't remember what the others were. So soon we loaded back up with our goodies & away we went. Oh yes, one other thing. Most folks were quite friendly and said hello or nodded as we walked past. Several of them asked "South African?????" They mostly speak English, but were assuming that all of us "white" people were just on holiday from South Africa. Mr T said there were not many non-Africans that came that far out to a village. We didn't tell them we were Americans.











Next stop was a regular grocery store. It was extremely busy and quite decorated for Christmas. Mr T said it would probably close at noon for the holiday. He said in the past folks would have been more excited about the holiday, but the collapse of the economy had left most without any way to purchase anything special to celebrate, so couldn't do too much & had lost some of their enthusiasm. He also asked that we not try to give anyone money or handouts because they didn't want to set a precedence that visitors would be expected to provide handouts. Will mention a bit more about the economy later. Anyway, did see lots of folks very dressed up buying last minute items to take to their family visits. He said they didn't really do "pot lucks" so to speak, but would bring things over to share & would help to cook things together. I wanted a picture of several of the ladies, but was hesitant to disturb them on their special day. I did compliment several of the women and they seemed thrilled, with big smiles of acknowledgement. One lady was wearing some bright blingy high heeled pumps & her husband was in a suit. They really lit up when I complimented them! I helped locate the tomatoes and the sales girl was just thrilled to help me. Pulled aside some of the stacked cases to help me pick out the best ones! One really fun thing - apparently there is not a lot of change available, you know actual coins? So when Michele bought some cookies (they call them biscuits) to take as a gift, they gave us change in lollipops! Mr T was rather peeved with that -said they were not supposed to do it, but anyway, Michele was thrilled and went around giving the little children lollipops! Wish I had gotten a picture of that! Connie had gotten a few too and was going to follow Michele's idea, but she was kinda broad sided by some

teenage boys that said they deserved lollipops too. She didn't argue, just handed them over!!!
Teenage boys are the same world wide, huh?

Then we drove on to the Homestead of Mr & Mrs Impala. I think I'll stop here & get this one out.
Don't want to make them too big & want to include lots of pictures of the homestead & visit.

Lots of love & good wishes!!

Pamela & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #26 (Hwange Christmas -family)

Date: 1/6/2015

Hello Everyone! Want to get this report sent before we get into the dance week & don't have time to work on this!! Sooooo, here we go!



This is our first view of Mr & Mrs Impala's Homestead. It is fenced (probably to keep some of the wildlife out and the chickens, dogs, & goats inside! The small rectangular shed is their "long drop" which is the outhouse. Basically a hole in the ground. The Impala's are really lucky -a few years back, someone donated funds & labor to give them a pump well on their property, so they do have access to water without having to walk down to the river with their buckets! Quite an improvement. There is electricity available in the nearby area, but they can't afford either it or the accessories that would require it!



So Mr & Mrs Impala met us as we disembarked the bus & gave us very sincere welcomes. Then directed us to their meeting room (they call it a kitchen).







This kitchen is totally empty generally, except for meeting/eating times. The men were directed to sit on their left as they entered and the women to the right. We sat on benches built into the walls. Even the rooster wanted to participate, but they kept shooing him out! The family & neighbors sat on a homemade mat in the center.







The young man that was interpreting for us, asked that we take turns & each stand up & give them some information about who we were. Although most of them wouldn't speak English (too shy), they obviously understood and all laughed in the appropriate places and they ululated loudly when we each finished our introductions. Generally the men (John was brave enough to be first!!) stood up and motioned for their wives & then they did the introductions! I even let George do all our talking! Our 2 ladies introduced themselves. By the way, we all learned to ululate very quickly! You make an ooh sound while puckering your lips and quickly flicking your tongue from side to side. They ululate to show appreciation for something, in their singing, while they are dancing, and to demonstrate their sadness. Luckily we never had to experience the sadness part!



Then they handed around a Boabab tree seed pod for us to have a taste. The seeds are covered with a dry foamy material that you suck on. The seeds are quite large -a bit smaller than a peanut and very hard. Our interpreter warned us not to bite down on them! The flavor was similar to an orange Starburst -minus the sugar! Actually pretty tasty!



Then they handed around a grain and showed us how they grind it to make the flour to make their staple food, polenta.



Through their interpreter, they gave us quite a lot of information about the Head man's duties: settling disputes, making community decisions, assigning homes, providing protection -they are not voted into the position -it is handed down from father to son or to brothers, much like being from a royal family or something. Speaking of that -if a woman's husband dies, she has the option of remaining single or if she chooses, she could marry his brother! Then they described the men's regular duties -feeding & caring for the farm animals, making & repairing the huts thatched roofs. And the women's duties -getting up before sunrise & getting water to cook breakfast, repairing the hut walls (made from the mud from termite mounds), making the woven pads they use to cover the dirt floors, & on & on & ON! They mentioned that the young women have to iron their clothes. Iron, I said? But you have no electricity! So they sent one of the girls running and she came back to show me their Coal iron! You put hot coals inside & use both the weight (it's really really really heavy) and the heat to iron! Man oh man am I appreciative of modern technology!!!!



They brought in water & juice & asked us to help ourselves to a drink. While we were sipping our

beverages, they wanted to ask us some questions! Really interesting the things they asked -do you pay a dowry to get married, what age do you marry, do the parents arrange the marriages, and then what kind of wild animals do you have in the US? What is an earthquake like? What is a volcano? Really interesting. One thing that I found very interesting was realizing that even though most of the African countries are relatively small (Botswana was about the size of Texas, Zambia is about the same size as California), unless you have a passport, you are not allowed to travel between countries & most people could not afford a passport -would cost about \$400! And in Zimbabwe, the corrupt president & his cronies control the journalist. They only allow their approved news to be reported. Even though some folks have satellite dishes (those that have electricity anyway!!!), the only stations available only run old movies or approved political announcements.



Then it was time for the women to head to the kitchen to cook Christmas dinner! The men are not allowed in this smaller separate hut. Remember, the ladies are also responsible to make the walls & shelves & benches in the huts! Take a look at the shelves they had built for their cookware! It was rather smoky inside because just after we got inside, it came a really hard rain shower and wouldn't all the smoke to escape out the center ceiling vent. Most of our women escaped the smoky room. Connie, Daz & I stayed to help. Janie came in and out to take pictures & help too.



First they covered the dried soy with water to re hydrate it AND soaked the Mopane worms! They then rinsed them and Connie got to help transfer them into the pot to cook them! Also put the peanuts in a pan & cooked them!



The young girls were enlisted to run back & forth to get us more water from the pump hydrant & to rinse off our cutting board. Got really tickled at them, because they wanted to rinse off the cutting board between the chopping of each item -onions, tomatoes, cucumbers. We had to tell them that it was okay not to wash it each time! We knew they were trying to keep us happy in knowing that they were washing everything. Pretty funny considering that the dogs were often over there helping & trying to lick the utensils! We all figured if we didn't get sick from this meal, we had excellent constitutions! And none of us got sick!!!



But I'm ahead of myself. Notice the way the dirt looks shiny? It was the kind of soil that when wet, it became a very sticky mud. Two steps and you were noticeably taller! Very slippery too. But at least it had quit raining! Mr T tried to make use of the fence to scrape some of the mud off! Those of us in the kitchen just stayed there to try & not track the mud in! Useless battle, but we tried!



Connie & I took turns with the chopping (Janie came in and helped too!!) -cut up lots of tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, & finally apples. She was determined we would cut up all the apples, but we finally convinced her to take a few of them back to hold for gifts for later.



After we had finally finished the meal preparation, the kids wanted us to take pictures with them. Wish we could have given them a copy!!



Notice some of the women preparing the dishwashing station for after the meal????? They also rinsed off all the plates for our meal! Oh boy!





While we were hard at work on the meal, the men had all walked into the Village to buy some locally made beer. George said that was not really pleasant. Basically they took them to a bar & some of the other locals were quite inebriated & a bit overbearing. They brought us back some beer to taste. It was pretty bad. Kind of a soy based fermented something. Very very sour & bitter.



Then it was time to eat! The women were to first serve their men. We filled their plates, then were to serve them on our knees! Hummmm? None of us really got on our knees -used both the excuse that the floor was muddy and that our knees were creaky! But we did bow down to them and the local ladies thought that was marvelous. Ululated very loudly!! We advised the men to not get used to that!! Mr T had thoughtfully brought some "regular" food too -tomato & lettuce sandwiches, little quiches, & a fruit dessert cake. There was a chicken dish that Daz suggested we use the juice from it to flavor our polenta. That was a good idea.



After we had all served ourselves and Mrs Impala had served Mr Impala & herself, they allowed the other neighbors & lesser relatives to come in and serve themselves. There was plenty food for all!





Then the ladies that had not helped to cook volunteered at the Dish washing station! Luckily the chickens were there to eat the scraps off the plates!!!!



By this time Mr T was getting anxious & wanted us to get back to the camp! He had originally planned that we'd be back to camp by about 3pm, but it was about 4pm and we hadn't had our homestead tour yet! So we tagged along behind our interpreter and he described the use of some of the other out buildings.



Hadn't realized that I only had this one blurry picture of the girls & young boys sleeping room. Just the one small bed & a small desk against a wall with some wax candles for them to do their school work! But they were very very proud of the fact that they were going to school and all bragged about what grade they were in. Very touching.



A storage shed for all their farm equipment. Hand push plows, although they did have a larger plow that could be pulled by oxen. Most of the other tools seemed to be hand made.



The fenced area with the bushes was where they kept the goats & cattle at night to try & protect them from the hyena. Said the elephants didn't usually bother the homesteads, but he did have to come out & kill cobras & pythons quite frequently at night to protect the chickens. Yipes! That's enough to give you cold chills!!



The only square building with a window was the sleeping quarters of Mr & Mrs Impala. They didn't let us see the inside of it.



As we were heading to the bus, Mr T had one of the ladies show us how she carried a bucket of water. That bucket was totally full of water! I probably couldn't even lift it, much less carry it on my head! Amazing!!!



Mr T gave them all a thumbs up for taking such good care of us and they lined up to wave goodbye as we left! What an unbelievable Christmas Day! It was unforgettable.



Drove through a herd of cattle as we left. A pretty hefty looking bull!!





Saw Rock Hyrax & more elephant -including this adorable baby!!! on the way back. Just as we got to the camp, the manager called to say that he had spotted Painted Wolves. We went on a wild fast drive to look for them, but all for naught. Such a shame, but man was it exciting to go look for them!!! We got back to camp at dusk, so they walked us back to our cabins & said they'd come back & get us in a few minutes to let us wash up, etc. I was playing the video of the irate elephant & listening to it's trumpeting when all the sudden we heard really loud rumbling right outside our tent. Doors & windows were closed so we couldn't see out. First thought it was a lion, then realized it was an elephant. It made some loud trumpeting noises. When we discussed it with everyone else at dinner, we had all thought it was practically on our decks!! Have no idea where they really were, but apparently a herd of elephants had wandered through the camp!! Whew!





They had decorated our Christmas Evening dinner table with angels!





So ended our most special African Christmas!!!! Awesome Awesome Awesome!

Sorry I was so long winded, but it was just a magical day!

Thanks for sharing it with me!

Lots of love,

Our evening entertainment was getting to play drums & watching the men dance! Great great fun!!! Some really fast feet out there! We did our 2 chas again & got loud claps, cheers, & ululating!!

Pamela & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #27 (Hwange to Victoria Falls)

Date: 1/6/2015

Hello Again,

Hope I haven't driven you all nuts with my descriptions. This was just such an incredible adventure, I'm still beside myself with how exciting it was. Now we move on to the last bit which was 2 nights in Victoria Falls (big city comparatively!) and then the extension in Cape Town -a really big city! So, enough, lets just get to it!



Enjoyed our last beautiful view from the Kashawe Tent Camp in Hwange National Park! It's been so wonderful! Another early morning so that we could be on the road by 7am!



Lovely drive out through the park, saw Impala, Giraffe, raptors, & even better views of the Cliff Springs. Sure going to miss this! Then out of the park, through the mines & on to the Spray View Hotel in Victoria Falls.



Carried our hand carry to our rooms while watching the Baboons all around us. Apparently the hotel tries to keep them chased off the roofs, but we heard them bounding around up there!



Had a few minutes to get settled in and then on to have lunch at the Rainforest Cafe at the Victoria Falls National Park. Yummy Chicken Salad lunch with Carrot cake for dessert! We think this might be what the chain restaurants in the US are base on -menu looks similar. Very tasty!



First stop was a map to orient ourselves. Mr T said we could walk at our own pace, but most of us elected to stay with him anyway. There were 16 viewpoints. We were not visiting at the high water point, that is usually in April/May time frame. The falls were named by Dr Livingstone in 1855, he's believed to be the first European to see them and named them after Queen Victoria. Mosioa-Tunya—"the smoke that thunders" is the African name & is also officially accepted by the World Heritage List. Victoria Falls is neither the highest, nor the widest, but is considered the largest due to it's width times height forming a continuous sheet of falling water. It is about twice the height of Niagara Falls & twice the width of Horseshoe Falls. When it's at it's highest water point, they say you cannot actually see the falls due to the mist rising from it's thunderous flow.







Went down the short chain walk at the 3rd viewpoint. Check out the "barrier" to keep you away from the edge!!





There was plenty of mist on us and then it actually rained too -only time during our trip that it actually rained while we were out! Didn't much matter since we were wet from the mist anyway! And it was quite warm, so it was still very comfortable! Although I must admit we looked like drowned rats!





In between the viewpoints there was a nice paved (although rather slicky) path under the trees.





Each viewpoint had something else to look at. We all stayed together until we'd gotten a group picture, then some went on ahead.





So during the highest water levels, there would not be any rock showing, just a continuous sheet of water. They say the mist can be viewed up to 30 MILES away!!!



So to the right side of this photo is what I believe to be the Devils Cataract. With guidance, folks actually walk out to this calm pool & swim/float along the edge. We never saw anyone there.





Looking down into the chasm! No place for a Lady of the Mist here!!!!



Mr T pointed out a "rhino," incase we don't see one tomorrow!! Always helpful -that Mr T!!!



Awesome!

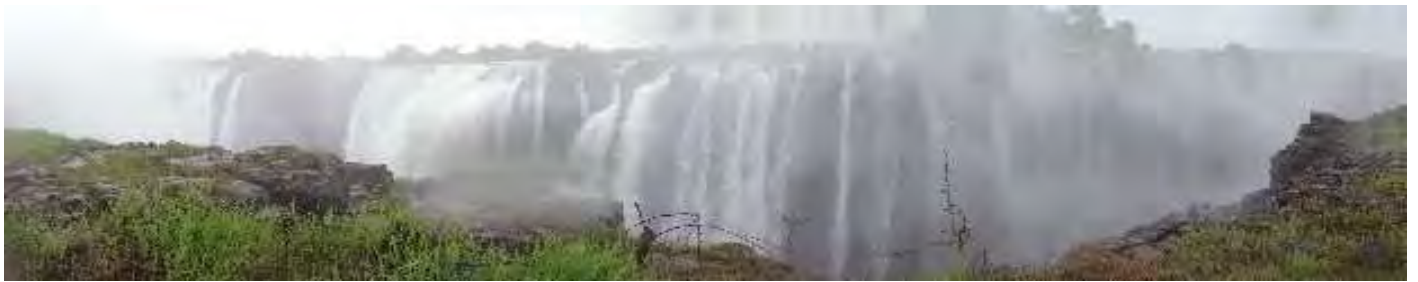


Just to give you a bit of a perspective!





Happy Drowned rats!!



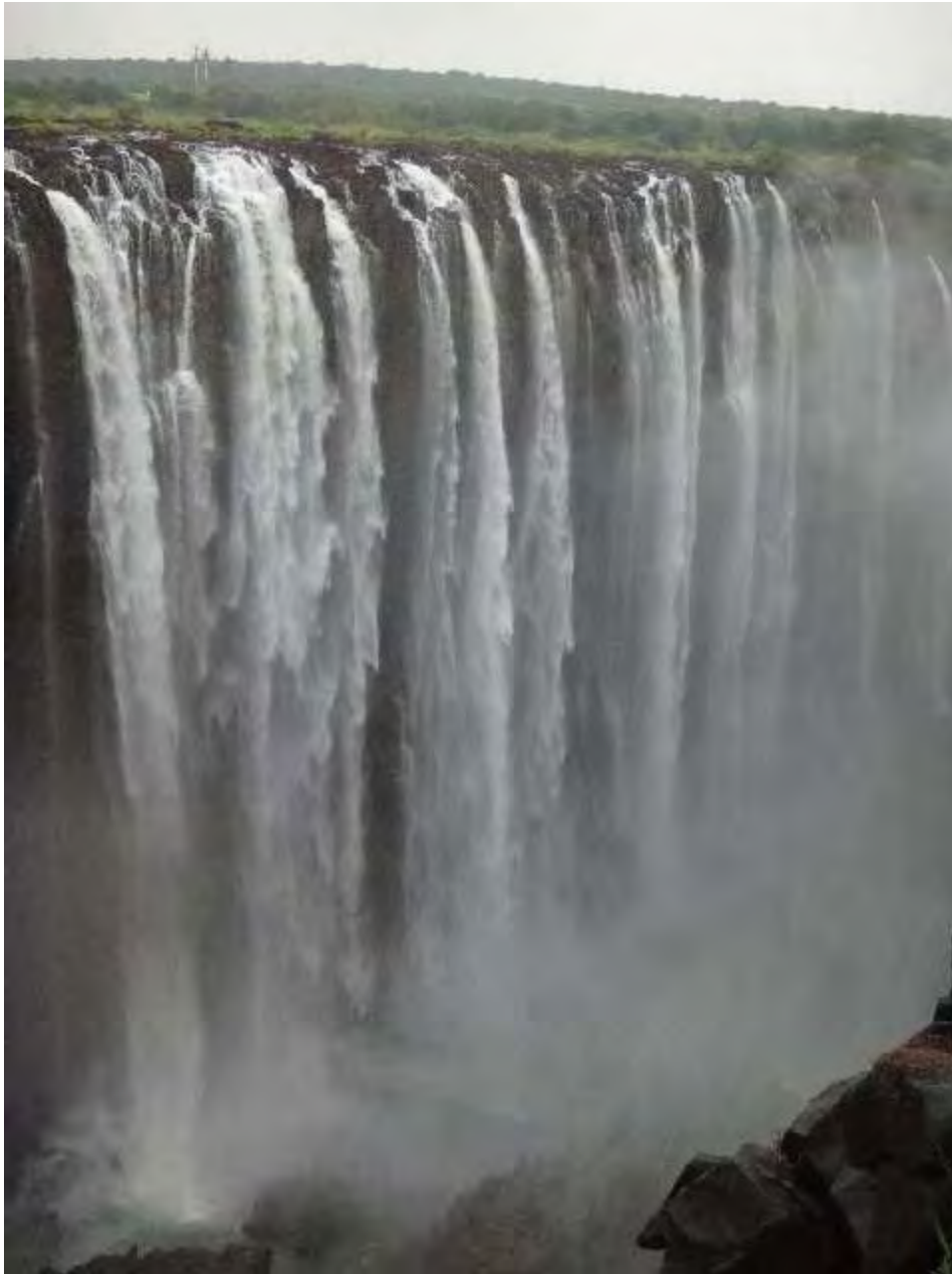
Isn't it incredible????



See that dot in the overhead mist???? That's what we'll be doing tomorrow!!



So imagine -no rock showing! Just a continuous sheet of water!! But of course then you couldn't see it anyway -too much mist!!

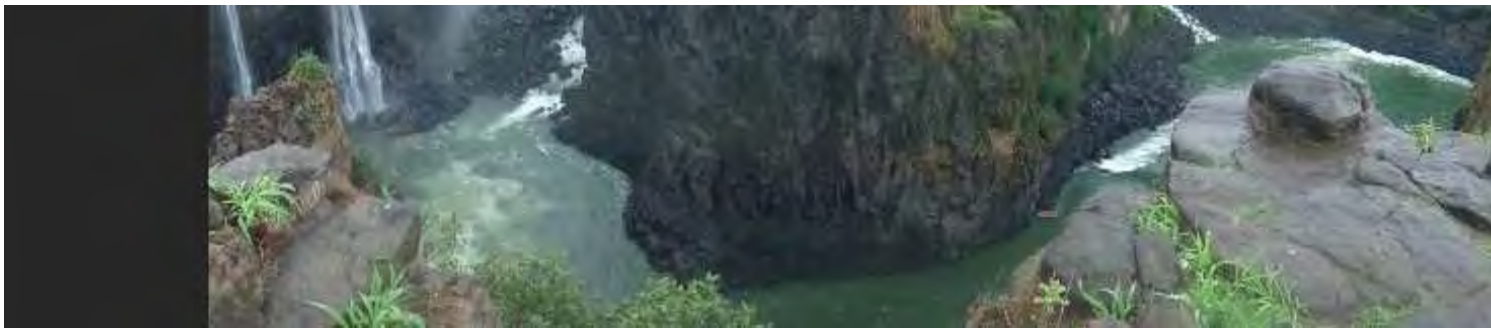




A bit of the bottom.



Be careful Marlyn!



The end of the Zimbabwe side. Isn't the water gorgeous!



See that tiny little boat down there? They actually do white water rafting going the other way. You'll see it better on when we take photos from the bridge tomorrow.



And those little white dots on the cliff across the gorge are people. That is an island between Zambia & Zimbabwe and you get to it from a pedestrian bridge on the Zambian side. We didn't have time to do that.



That is one crazy guy! Not in our group!!!!



Just absolutely incredible.



This is the Victoria Falls Bridge that we drove over a few days back. Tomorrow we'll take that bridge walk like those tiny little people you can see in the distance. More about the bridge later. It connects Zambia & Zimbabwe -border stations on each end. Notice that it is only about 2/3rd painted. More tomorrow.



Contemplating!



Made it back to the Rainforest Cafe & found some of our group toasting our tour of the falls. Michele does not look nearly as much of a drowned rat as I do! Not fair!!!



Good advice -I think we'll take it!



Excellent regulations!!





Look at there cool carved faces on the culvert bridge into the park!



And there you have it -he's checking out that litter bin!





Not sure what was going on with my camera! But anyway, we had a lovely dinner at the hotel restaurant. Even had live dinner music. This group came around to everyone's table & sang acapella. Absolutely gorgeous harmony. Have a video of them. Of course we had noticed throughout the trip that many of the Africans could really sing! Lovely lovely voices.

So, that was our first day in Victoria Falls! Tomorrow will be amazing! So don't go away! We had several choices of things to do tomorrow. I asked if there was any way that we could do it all. Well of course we could! Just took money and fabulous scheduling expertise by Mr T!

More to come!

Lots of love,

Pamela & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #28 (Rhino & Elephant)
Date: 1/6/2015
Good Evening Everyone!

So let's get to one of the most exciting days of the entire vacation!! Unfortunately it started at 4:40am!!!! Man alive I cannot believe we were getting up soooooooo early in the morning! But when you are trying to DO IT ALL, you have to leave the sleep out of the picture!!



The hotel wasn't serving breakfast at this ridiculously early time in the morning, but luckily the hotel room had coffee! It was Ken & Sue & Marlyn & us that were on this adventure. Michele used to work with Elephants at a zoo, so she decided to skip this adventure. Anyway, this was an Elephant ride & Rhino Safari combo. 2 guides picked us up at the airport & we had to dodge Baboons on our way to the Stanley & Livingstone Private Reserve.





We went to the really spiffy looking exclusive hotel to pick up our jeep! Even the jeep was a limo version! Still 3 rows of seats, but each row was only 2 seats & they were deeply padded captains chairs with a huge armrest to the outside edge that held nice water proof ponchos for each individual. The armrest also put you away from the outside edge of the jeep, so that you didn't get whipped by the wet branches!! This is a 6000 acres private game reserve on the border of the Zimbabwe National Park. They claim to have the Big 5 on their property. They are fenced & have armed security patrols because of the black rhinos on the property. Because the Black Rhinos are almost extinct, the parks that have them have to agree to provide security from the poachers. The horn of the rhino can fetch nearly a half million -just 1 horn!









It started drizzling soon after we started the drive. Not cold, but rather miserable. We only had 1 1/2 hour on the safari before we had to show up for the elephant ride part of the tour. We were all desperately looking "through the Bushes," but to no avail. We saw the usual Impala, a beautiful Sable, some helmeted guinea fowl, an elephant, some zebra, and then we were at the Elephant camp. We were very very disappointed, but trying to suck it up. Mr T had told us that it was only a 50/50 chance of seeing a rhino. But the guide said he really felt bad & would do some checking while we were riding the elephant & if he could find any spoor, he's take us back out again. That gave us a little hope!



We took a quick potty stop & then went for our safety briefing about our upcoming Elephant ride. John & Connie were there waiting for us too. And the rain stopped!!!!



There were to be 12 elephants out with our group & we were to be 2 per on each of the Elephants & then the guide too. We would climb the stairs & climb aboard behind the guide.



The guide on the Elephant gave them treats as we climbed on with the help of the other guide on the stand.





I climbed on (we straddled the Elephant!) behind our guide Tom. George got on behind me. Totally comfortable perch!



His big ears wrapped around Tom's legs & covered the tips of my shoes. He had just recently taken a mud bath and the tips of my shoes were soon shaded a lovely color of clay red!





So much like a guided horse back ride, we headed off. Marlyn had to ride with a young man with dreadlocks! But apparently they got along fine! Ken & Sue were together of course.



John & Connie were doing okay too.



Our Elephant, Mionos, was constantly eating as we ambled along.



After we'd ridden about 15 minutes, the manager & the photographer had everyone stop & they went from Elephant to Elephant & got the riders' cameras to get a picture. That was really nice! The manager carried a rifle. He said he'd had to use it a couple of times. Once he said a Cape Buffalo was charging the Elephants. That would be scary. Glad we didn't have any issues!





Tom kept giving Mionos treats while we were getting our picture made! So all the Elephants were rescued, generally when they were quite young. Mostly because their Mother's had been killed by poachers. Tom was incredibly knowledgable. Said he was a licensed guide, but enjoyed working with the elephants and had been there 12 years. He spoke English very very well & kept up a running commentary telling us about the flora & fauna. Said the Elephants went through a lot of training to be used here & every morning they would come in and give them verbal commands. As long as they responded correctly, they would use them that day, but if they didn't, they were given the day off. If they didn't respond well the next day, they would call in a vet because it was unusual for them to be in a bad mood 2 days in a row. But when they went into musk, they would just turn them loose in the reserve and let them run free for the 3 months they would be looking for a mate. He said after their hormones settled down they would always return on their own to the camp! Apparently they were quite content with their lives there!



Ken & Sue and John & Connie with zebras in the background!!



After the picture stop, we lined up single file to follow the trail. Got really tickled when the elephant in front of us had to take a potty break!!



After reversing the boarding process, we tried to get our land legs back! They mentioned that they used to do a bit longer rides, but had too many complaints from folks having Saddle sores!!



Then the real fun! We got to feed Mionos!!!! That was great fun!!











So then our Jeep Guide came up and said he had heard from another guide that he had located some Rhinos! Wanted to know if we could delay our included breakfast to go look! We all immediately said YES & off we went! A wild fast ride across the park.



When we got to the other guide, our guy jumped out & they headed into the bush to check it out. The other guide said he didn't think he'd feel comfortable going off road to get there, but our guide was raring to go! So off we went!!



Straight through the brush & bounced around driving over stumps & logs & brush!!









And there they were! A male, female, & baby!!!! Said they hadn't seen the female for 4 months and the baby was 2 months old!!! Absolutely the most wonderful feeling you can imagine to see these guys! How lucky can we be?????





Our guide decided to just take us back to the hotel in the Jeep. Besides seeing a warthog at the Elephant camp, we ended up in the middle of all the Elephants as they returned them to their resting field!! That was really fun!!



Whew! What an awesome morning! And it's still before noon!!!

More later!!

Lots of love,

Pamela & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #29 (Copter, Bridge & Slide)
Date: 1/7/2015
Good Morning Everyone!

Lets just get to it! There was only 2 days here at Victoria Falls & we had to make the most of it! This was the only day that had free time with options of different tours! We wanted it all!!!!



When the guide returned us to the Spray View, we ran for a potty break & then back to run for our Helicopter Flight over Victoria Falls. Of all the advice we heard for optional things to do in Victoria Falls, this was the number 1! And since we've done it, I must agree. Well worth the money! The Helicopter company was called "Flight of Angels." Named after Dr David Livingstone's quotation in 1855 when he first discovered Victoria Falls - "....no one can imagine the beauty of the view....but scenes so lovely must have been gazed upon by angels in their flight." Anyway, John & Connie had come over while we were seeing the Black Rhinos, but a rain storm had delayed them, so we

got there in time to see them take off & return! I think they enjoyed it, what do you think?







We had about a half hour before our flight, so we amused ourselves checking out the maps of the route. We had a safety briefing about the flight and I was busy taking pictures!!!





Soon it was our turn. Marlyn got the front seat & we got comfortable in the back. Very comfy for 4! Each had our own full window!



Since the flight was in a figure 8, both sides got perfect views of the falls. Ken & Sue got the first chance.



Even when they completed the circle away from the falls, the green river gorges and the city of Victoria Falls was wonderful to look at!



I have never had a vacation that had soooooo many chill bump moments. This was definitely one of them!!!





Views were just constantly spectacular!!! Notice the bridge over the gorge. We'll soon be getting our tour of that!



Used the back part of the circle to get a photo of Ken & Sue!



Here's a look at the Zambezi that we'll get to cruise on tonight!



And as we were coming back to the helipad, we saw Elephants!!!! Probably our last chance to see them!!



And one last view of the mist in the distance!!



We ran back to the hotel in time for lunch! Good to get back together again!! But we had to eat fast! More things to do!!





Now we headed across to the Zambian side for our Historical Tour of the Victoria Falls bridge. It started with a wonderful costumed presentation by "Mr Georges Imbault, the Chief Construction Engineer" of the bridge construction project. The bridge was the brain child of Cecil Rhodes, who never visited the Falls, but had a dream of a train track from Cape to Cairo. Never happened & he died before the bridge was even started, but once completed in 1905, it was used for many years for both passenger trains & cargo trains from the mines. It was upgraded for road & foot traffic in 1924. Originally only certified for 100 years, it has since been check & recertified, but they do limit speed of the trains & weight of the trucks.





After the talk, "Mr Georges Imbault" took us along the cat walk under the bridge & over the Zambezi!





Neither of us are afraid of heights & with all the security of the straps & cramp on's, it was a very pleasant walk across the bridge. There were only 8 of us on the tour (didn't know the others) & we took a leisurely stroll along the cat walk, with plenty of time to enjoy the view!



Remember when I pointed out the island yesterday with the tiny little folk showing up on the cliff side? Here's the pedestrian bridge walk to get over there. Looks pretty neat, but nothing on the island, but a walk around the edge to see the falls.





These 3 pictures are a forward view, a view across underneath the bridge & a view of the folks coming behind.



There's the starting point for the Zipline over the gorge -we're doing that next!





This is looking down and to our right. You can just see the tiny dots of folks that are walking the trail beside the small falls to the Zambezi below. Sometimes they use that spot as a start off for white water rafting, but they must have all already gone today.



You can just glimpse the famous Victoria Falls Hotel on the far bank. It was built in 1904. Supposed to be wonderful to see, but we didn't have time to make it there. Mike, Diana, Walt & Janie went there this afternoon. One sad note, the elephants migrate along the falls. Because of

all the hotels that have grown up around the falls, they can no longer find their exact path and 5 have fallen to their death this past year. Have no idea what they can do to help them. Very sad.





There's the starting point for the bungee jumping. We are NOT doing that!!! Our guide said that if they jumped correctly, we would see them on our side of the bridge -sure enough -there he was!!!



Here's another one!



Asked "Mr Imbault" to take a picture for us! Are we strapped in or what????



There's where we were standing yesterday & looking at the bridge!



We had to scrunch under to cross over to get to the far side to get off the cat walk.



There where the folks get off the zipline on this side!



I took a few pictures as I was waiting my turn for the zipline.



Next thing I knew....there was the guy to catch me! I had done the entire zipline (at least 20 seconds????) without snapping a single picture! Phooey!





Quick snapped off 3 pictures and then there he was to grab me! Oh well! Would definitely do it again!





I took a video of George's entire run across the gorge! It's cool. As soon as I finish the travelogues, I'll try to get the videos posted on Shutterfly!



We were really having to run to make everything! We rushed back to the hotel after the Bridge Tour & Zipline and just barely had time to take a potty break (I didn't even make it to the room, just had to use the toilet in the restaurant!!!) and we had to hop on the bus to head to our Sunset Dinner Cruise on the Zambezi. But the others had had time to get dressed! Is Diana spiffy or what? Looking good!!!!





The cruise was wonderful. Perfect temperature & lovely setting. Probably supposed to be romantic, but the noisy Americans were very happy & very loud! Marlyn gave a farewell speech! He & Michelle head back to Portland tomorrow morning -they are the only couple not going with us to Cape Town. Don't want them to go!!!!!!





Michele checked out the Zimbabwe money we had scored during the day, while Mr T fixed Joyce's glasses! Man that guy could do everything!!!!



I mentioned at one time about the Zimbabwe money. Wanted to explain a little. Zimbabwe had

runaway inflation a few years back. They now use the American currency and the street guys pander the old money for souvenirs! We felt like we had to have some for my nephew's collection!!! At the height of their inflation, the 10 Trillion dollars was worth about \$2!!!! Said that if you got paid you spent it immediately because by evening it might be worthless! The store keepers had to make charts to keep track of the numbers of zeros!!! The government was using the cheapest paper they could to print the currency! Pretty sad!



We had one final group picture before Marlyn & Michele leave us!!!



Spotted a big crocodile on the bank just posing for us!



Finally caught a hippo with it's mouth open!!



Got a shot of Marlyn & Michelle cuddling! Sure been wonderful to have you guys on the trip!!!



As we got ended the cruise, there was lightning almost all around us. Wanted to get a picture, but couldn't figure out how! Anyway, no thunder yet & just nice pleasant temperature.

Pamela & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #30 Victoria Falls to Cape Town
Date: 1/8/2015

Hi Guys, We're getting close to the end of this most fabulous vacation ever! Ever!!! But hang in with us a bit longer!



Didn't have to leave for the airport until 11:30am, but not to give us too much time off, Mr T had a local preacher/business man come & do a talk on Dr David Livingstone at 8:30am!! We thought we might sleep through it, but woke up at 6:30am (what is wrong with this picture!!!!), so even had time for breakfast first -although I took coffee & muffin with me to the talk! I don't remember the gentleman's name, but he was fantastic. Have never ever heard anyone talk faster than he did! Supposed to be about a half hour talk, but an hour later, he was still spewing out information....and no one was yawning! He was really really good. I won't bore you with details, but interesting to find out that the US had sent Henry Morton Stanley to find Dr Livingstone in 1869, after he had been missing for many years, to show support for both his anti slavery campaign & to honor his contributions of both geographical discoveries & exploration. Supposedly the famous "Dr Livingstone, I presume" mostly came from Stanley's embarrassment & awe of Dr Livingstone's reputation when he was finally face to face with the man that was so exalted in his mind! I personally had not realized that the main reason for Dr Livingstone's original travel to Africa was as a missionary! Although he is personally only said to convert his personal help man, most folks in Africa contribute his work as the main reason that most countries in Africa are mainly Christian.





Enroute to the airport, we stopped at "the Big Tree," thought to be between 1000 & 1500 years old. Huge in both height & width, it is a beautiful tree.



Uneventful check in at the airport, but after we'd made it through Security there was a commotion due to Ken's zipper pocket getting stuck. Good excuse Ken! Janie was finally able to retrieve the cash Ken had stashed there! Did you give her a tip Ken?





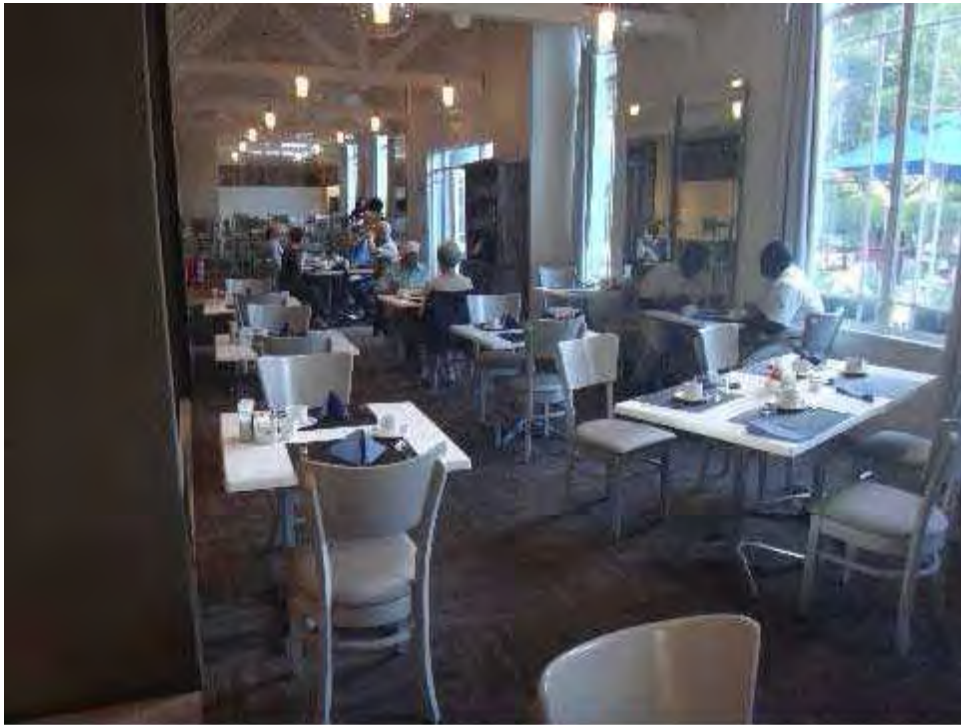


Flight into Cape Town gave us a beautiful sunset! It was after 9pm when we finally got there! Very pretty airport. Apparently they owe thanks to the 2010 FIFA World Cup (Soccer) when it was extensively renovated. It is now the 3rd busiest airport in all of Africa!



Only about a half hour drive to our hotel -Inn on the Square. I know these pictures are blurry, but wanted to let you see that the streets nearby our hotel were decorated full out for the Holidays! Just amazing!!!







Luckily for us, OAT had decided to have Mr T travel with us to Cape Town. Usually the Safari guide does not follow on to the post excursion, but they had been hearing some complaints & sent Tinashe to ensure our comfort & satisfaction. Although he was not licensed to be a tour guide in South Africa (those licenses are very very expensive & each country has very difficult lengthy required processes to issue them), he was received well by the local guide & frequently gave advice & helped out all the time. For example the local guide wanted us to be ready for our tour at 7am when the hotel's breakfast service didn't open until 6:30am. Tinashe got us at least another 15 minutes to eat! And luckily so because the service was incredibly slow! Reminded me of Jamaica! Very pleasant, but slow moving! They put the food out, but no serving utensils, anyway, since we'd been so used to the constant catering of the Tent Camps, we were all taken aback! Our rooms were small (smallest bathroom I have ever seen -even smaller than in our RV -you had to slide in sidewise or you'd get hung up on the door!!!), but sufficient with good showers & comfy beds. We had a view of Table Mountain and the empty car park in front of the hotel becomes a bustling market place EVERY SINGLE DAY! More about that later!







I'll end this one here, we had a quite pleasant drive through the city to our first stop, cable car to the top of Table Mountain. The sky was incredibly blue & it was quite tropical. First impression is a city somewhat similar to San Diego! Therefore, we loved it!!

More soon -but now that we're back in teaching mode in Mesa -it's hard to get this done!!!!
And we have Blackford's dance weekend with the Worlock's going this weekend!

Lots of love,

Pamela & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #31 Table Mountain & Gardens

Date: 1/10/2015

Good Afternoon everyone!!

I'll get right into things! Our time is flying by quickly!!!



We soon found out why our local guide had wanted to get us started so early! The cable car didn't officially start until 8am, but you could apparently pay extra & go up starting at 7:30am. Also, there were 2 lines, one for those who had already purchased their tickets (luckily our guide had previously purchased ours!) and those waiting to purchase tickets. After they bought them, they then had to get in the back of the ticketed line! Yipes! This is one of the most popular tourist attractions in Cape Town, not only for visitors, but for the locals also & since most folks were off work for the holidays, it was mobbed!!

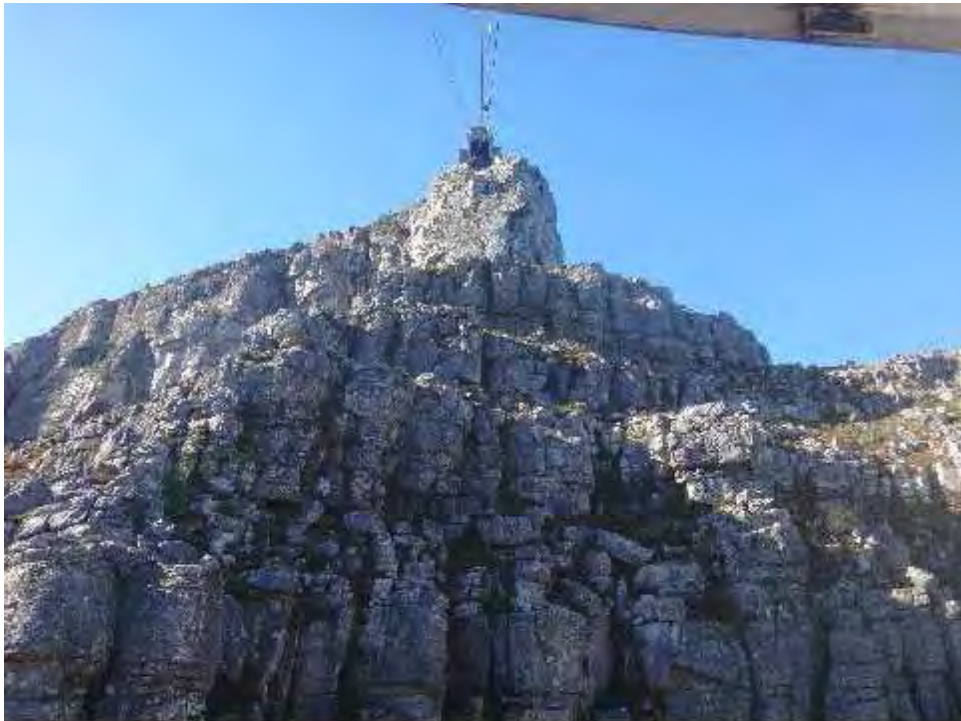






But it was pleasant standing outside & we were all busily taking pictures of everything! Didn't really have to wait too long -we were ready to step on the cable car a bit before 9am. So, a bit more about the mountain: it is 3558' tall and is considered the prominent land mark of Cape Town. The Mountain is a part of the Table Mountain National Park, but that title also encompasses Cape of Good Hope & is also included as part of the UNESCO Cape Floral Region World Heritage Site. The level top plateau is approximately 2 miles from side to side. The 3rd picture was taken while we were in the bus driving to the next spot, but I wanted to include it here to show you where we were. You can just see the top cable car station about in the center of the picture at the top right edge of the flat topped mountain. The bottom 2 pictures are from the internet and the top shows Table Mountain with Devil's Peak on the left and Signal Peak & Lions Head on the right. The bottom shows a panorama of Table mountain & looking south east.







The cable car takes passengers from the lower cable station on Tafelberg Road to the plateau at the top of the mountain. The original cable cars were opened in 1929 & renovated to the new cars in 1997. The cars hold 65 passengers & rotate 360 degrees during the journey. There are 2 opened windows, so everyone gets 2 views without having glass between! You move at a pretty fast pace, but still a long enough journey to give you incredible views!





It was an incredibly clear day with no wind. We discovered we were very very lucky, because the other 3 mornings, the "table cloth" of clouds had rolled over the mountain top & the plateau was covered & it was too windy to run the cable cars! Anyway, the views were incredible. You could see Robbin's Island in the distance -that is where Nelson Mandela was held in prison for so many years! Daz had hoped to take a tour there, but since the rest of us were going on a Winery Tour, she decided to forego that and go with us.



Our guide pointed out the direction we would go tomorrow for our drive down the west coast of the Western Cape to Cape Point.





He gave us about an hour to run around taking pictures. Looked up the new7wonders website - rather suspect! But guess if you want to give yourself a world designation -who am I to complain! It's certainly gorgeous!



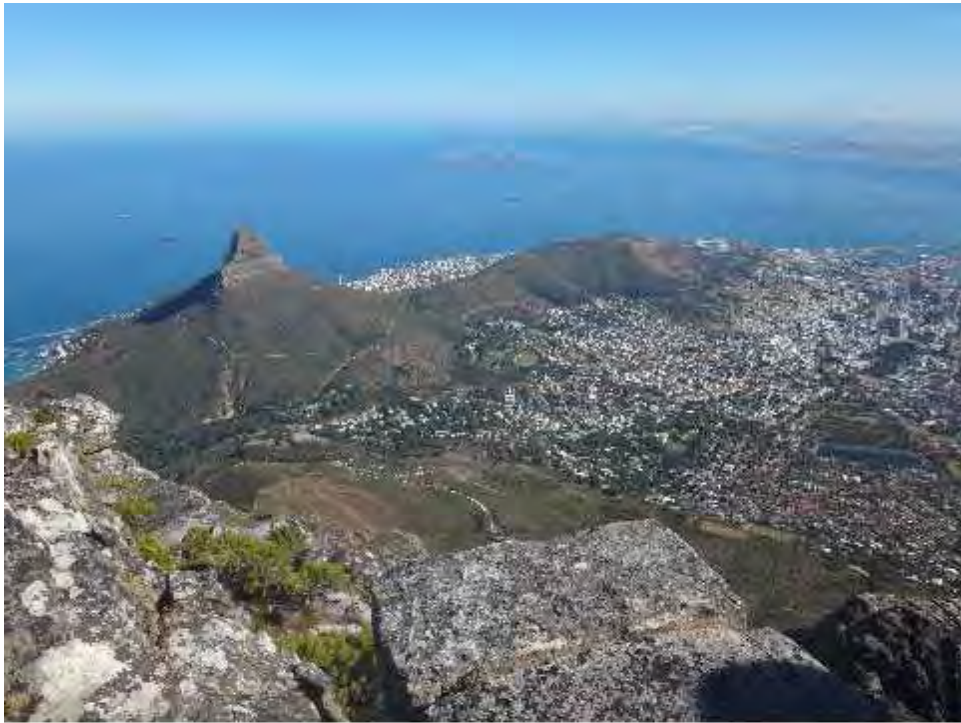
The Rock Hyrax has even found a spot way up here!!!



There is a gift shop of course! Didn't make it inside, but did use the toilets & read some interesting facts on the back of the toilet doors! (amazing way to advertise, huh?) They bring all water up & remove all the waster water & all trash via the cable cars! They actually use the tanks of water to help stabilize the cars! Quite commendable!









All of us were enthralled with the views.



Hopefully the text is legible. The gist of it (besides the legends) is that the warm air from the south push up and over the mountain, sometimes are very high speeds & covers the mountain clouds, but also rids Cape Town of pollution! It was amazing to watch the clouds roll down from the peak.



View of the cable station. Sure blends into the rocks.





Just a few last pictures!!



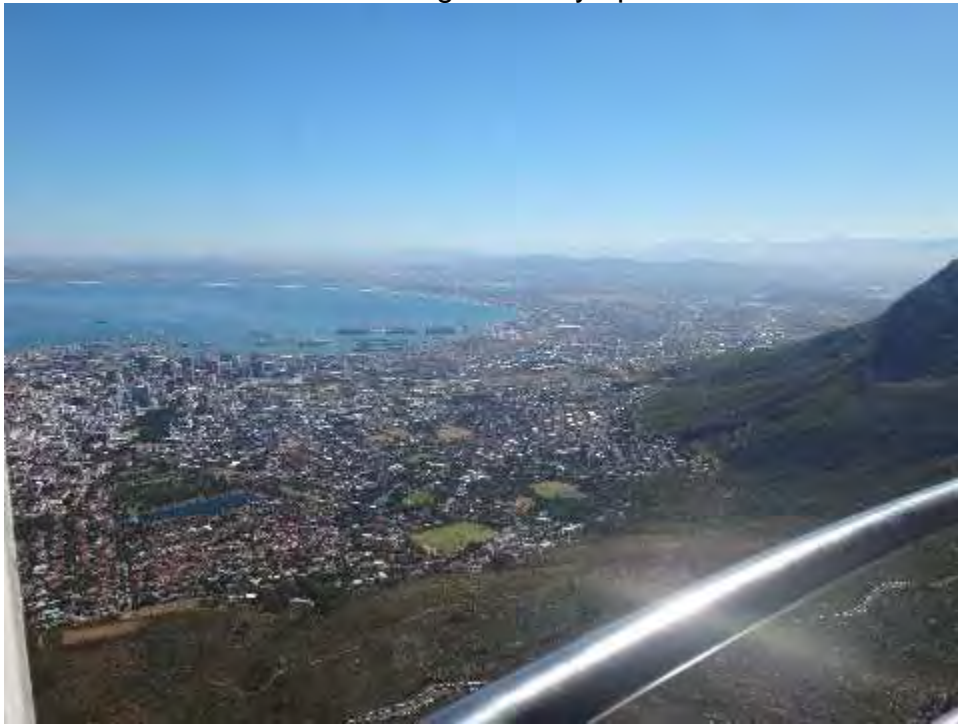
Watched these guys getting ready to rappel down the sides! Geez! That would be scary!! You can hike up too -usually takes 2 -3 hours. We talked to a couple that had just made it up in less than 2 hours. They were tired, but in good spirits & didn't even look too sweaty!



Soon it was time to return back to the city. Views on the way down were just as good!



Look at the lines of cars making their way up to ride the cable cars or hike the mountain!!!!





The 3 tall buildings that are just at the bottom of the grassy slope are called Salt, Pepper, & Mustard as the condiments for the "tablecloth!!!)





Got some pictures of the folks walking up the mountain. I think I'd rather ride up and walk down!!!









Took a lovely drive through the multimillion dollar neighborhoods both overlooking & down at the water's edge. Some of them have their own cable cars to get to them, never managed to get a picture of any. He told us that they must be electric only and that often lost power which would leave the owners either trapped inside or unable to get home OR EVEN TRAPPED IN THE CARS ENROUTE UP OR DOWN!!! Whew! That would be hard to live with, huh? Check out the pool on the top of this house! What a place to swim, man oh man!!!!



See that white speck between the buildings? That's a hang glider floating down to the beach from Lion's Head. That's hopefully to the beach. Our guide said they often landed on the buildings or in the street! Hummm? Don't think we'll try that one either!



Drove past the Harbor Shopping Center -that's the area we decided to go to for our New Year's Eve celebration -more about that later. Sure a beautiful area!!



As we drove to the Kirstenbosch Gardens, we could see the huge Parthenon looking building on the slopes of Devil's Peak. It is a Memorial to the Diamond magnate Cecil Rhodes. He was an incredible important man in the shaping of African history, with lots of amazingly good things about him & some not so good. Apparently one of his homes is now used as the Presidential mansion & we drove past it, but it was so covered in trees that we couldn't see it at all.



I'll just post some pictures of this beautiful National Botanical Garden, founded in 1913. It is located at the foot of the eastern slopes of Table Mountain. First the Visitor's Center had several displays to show some of the thousands of variety of trees, flowers, plants, etc (almost all indigenous). The land was bequeathed to the Nation by none other than Cecil Rhodes!!!





There was a beautiful memorial to Nelson Madela, with a special Golden version of the Bird of Paradise.



It was absolutely incredibly beautiful!!!









We spent a pleasant hour wandering the grounds. I could post a hundred pictures! I'll put them all on Shutterfly & let you know when they are there!







All that beauty made us hungry! Finished up with ice cream with Amarula topping! Yummmmm!!!

Enough for now! Gotta go dance!!!

Lots of love,

Pamela & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #32 District 6 & the Townships

Date: 1/11/2015

Good Morning Family & Friends,

We have come to our most controversial excursion. Must say that this afternoon was not "fun," although there were moments, but it was very informative & educational. Sometimes even horrifying. I think I might have mentioned before that most of this trip was entirely scheduled by Overseas Adventure Travel. There were only 3 days that we had any choice other than just to stay back at the camp if we didn't want to participate. The one day was in Victoria Falls, where George & I chose to do all the offered optional tours and then the last full day when we all chose to do the optional Stellenbosch Wine Country Tour. And this day. The morning tours of Table Mountain & the Gardens was included but the afternoon was a choice of "free time" or what was intitled "Townships of Cape Town." The description of this read "Discover the Townships of Langa, Guguletu, and Bonteheuwel on this afternoon tour, learning from the locals about their daily lives. Although the townships were originally created during the apartheid period as residential areas for non-whites, today they are vital and energetic urban communities that house a large percent of Cape Town's population. In a tour that will add to our in-depth knowledge of South Africa's people, we'll focus on the traditions, culture, and customs of the residents of these townships through a guided tour by a township resident and a home visit." OAT charged \$55 per person for this tour. Sounded pretty prosaic, but we figured we wanted to see any & everything on this trip, so signed up. So did John & Connie, Joyce, Dazarine, Ken & Sue. The other found us a nice restaurant & enjoyed a relaxing afternoon wandering near the hotel.

Okay, so here goes.













First off, we had to find lunch on our own. The local guide sent us to The Food Lovers Market. It was only about a half a block away past the huge market place in the parking lot of our hotel. The Food Lover's Market was a huge open building with loads of separate little areas with different food offerings. We wandered around, looking at the buffets of hot food, pizza, sandwiches, sodas, desserts, misc packages groceries, etc and made our way back for pizza. After you paid (pizza was by the slice, but most other items were weighed & charged by weight), you entered the other half of the room that was a casual seating area -mix of tall tables with stools, picnic style benches & bars type areas. You could see upstairs which was a HUGE gymnasium. Bustling with activity - all ages, but lots of young working age adults. We had our pizza (less than \$5 for both of us & the canned sodas!!), we ran back to the hotel for about a half hour before the afternoon tour.





We met at the little mini van & Sim, our local guide took us a short distance & let us out at the "District 6 Museum." We wandered in and he gave us a short briefing about the purpose of the museum. Most of us (except for Dazarine, I think) were standing in the center of the room looking at each other. Didn't understand a thing!! Luckily Mr T came over and started trying to explain a bit more in depth. Soooooo, here goes what I hope is a succinct description of the museum and what was to come for the afternoon. During the apartheid (word literally means Apart Hood or state of being apart) regime, which was a system of racial segregation enforced by the National Party from 1948 to 1994, this District 6 experienced a forced removal of all it's residents & destruction of all their homes & property. This District had been an active & vibrant neighborhood existing since 1867 and was a mix of many races, colors, religions, & nationalities. At the time of the forced removal, there were about 60,000 residents. On 11 February 1966, the government declared District Six a whites-only area & relocated everyone to "townships" established by the government. Each of these townships (literally meant Shipped to a town!), was strictly segregated by the governments classifications -black (a pencil stuck in their hair would remain if they shook their heads), white, colored, or Indian (which had some sub classifications). There were certain general treatments accepted by the government per racial classification. Blacks were the bottom of the heap & were not allowed education or medical care or any other public services as they were considered "not worthy." Not only were they removed, but they were in most cases forced to watch the destruction of their homes so that they would know there was nothing there for them to return to if they escaped their "new homes." The government did make some concessions & mostly didn't destroy places of worship. International & local pressure made redevelopment difficult for the government, so the area now sits pretty much bare -looks a bit like a war zone!! There was a University built and it is still operational now. This same Removal & forced Segregation was happening all over South Africa, so approximately 3.5 million folks were affected too, but District 6 became a bit of a rallying cry for reform. Since the democratic elections of 1994, the South African government has recognized many of the claims of loss & abuse & has pledged to support rebuilding. There is much much more to this story, but hopefully that's the basic facts.



Memorial built of many of the street signs from the original District 6.



ALL WHO PASS

REMEMBER THE THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WHO LIVED
FOR GENERATIONS IN DISTRICT SIX
AND WERE FORCED BY LAW TO LEAVE THEIR HOMES
BECAUSE OF THE COLOUR OF THEIR SKINS.
REMEMBER ST. MARK'S CHURCH AND THE COMMUNITY
WHO RESISTED THE DESTRUCTION OF DISTRICT SIX.

Hands Off District Six Campaign 11.2.1989

FOR USE BY WHITE PERSONS

THESE PUBLIC PREMISES AND THE AMENITIES
THEREOF HAVE BEEN RESERVED FOR THE
EXCLUSIVE USE OF WHITE PERSONS.

By Order Provincial Secretary

VIR GEBRUIK DEUR BLANKES

NIERDIE OPEGBARE PERSEEL EN DIE GENEWE
DAARVAN IS VIR DIE UITSLUITLIKE GEBRUIK
VAN BLANKES AANGEWYS.

Op Laai Provinsiale Sekreterin

A piece of translucent, slightly wrinkled material, possibly a plastic bag or a piece of paper, is shown. In the upper right corner, there is a faint, hand-drawn map with blue lines representing roads or boundaries. The map includes some text labels such as "THE BLACK HILLS", "SOUTH DAKOTA", and "WYOMING". Overlaid on the left side of the map is a quote in red, hand-painted capital letters. The quote reads: "HOLD FAST TO DREAMS FOR IF DREAMS DIE LIFE IS A BROKEN-WINGED BIRD THAT CANNOT FLY." Below the main quote, there is a smaller, faint red signature that appears to say "LINDA STAN".

**HOLD FAST
TO DREAMS
FOR IF DREAMS DIE
LIFE IS A
BROKEN-WINGED BIRD
THAT
CANNOT FLY.**

LINDA STAN







There are signs all over the walls & the floor is covered with poems & sayings that folks offered as memorials to their situation. The floor is also covered with a map of District 6 & many names are listed where families showed where they had homes prior to the destruction. It was a very sobering visit. Especially realizing how recent the wounds.





A view of the area. The newer looking buildings are the residences that the government is now providing in it's start to "fix" the problems.







Then to the real horror. Sim drove us the 25K to the township where most of the blacks were forced to live. Keep in mind, this is still in the heart of Cape Town -that vibrant city that I originally described as reminding me of San Diego. The city where Dr Christian Barnard performed the very first successful heart transplant! Turns out that our guide, Sim was actually born & raised in this particular township. Unsure how he escaped, but he is very well educated & his job as guide is considered a prime employment. One other strange thing. Look closely at that 2nd picture. Do you see the familiar round white shape? Yep, a satellite dish!!!! Several of these "homes" have pay as you go electric meters and they have satellite TV!!!!



We made a short stop to a local community center where they teach the residents a skill, such as pottery making or other such artistry to sell.









As this was a holiday time, we started seeing the local "McDonalds" selling their wares. Humm?





The kids all waved & smiled as we drove past. Seem to really want their pictures taken.





Our most interesting stop. A visit to the local "medicine man." We were warned not to touch anything. Didn't need that warning. We truly tried to levitate so that we didn't even have to touch our derrieres to the benches!!! He said he had been born into his position. For generations, his family had performed mental, physical, & metaphysical care of for the locals. He was very anxious to provide us a cure for something. John volunteered that Connie sometimes "gave him a headache!" So the "doctor" swatted her on the head several times with his "wand." What is that thing hanging from the ceiling??????? I didn't want to look very closely!





There were some thriving businesses -lots of Beauty shops! And convenience stores?



There are some local schools now and they are generally behind big fences to protect them from vandalism & theft. They also have drug issues (guess that's world wide, huh?) and degenerates are stealing copper for cash to fund their habits.



Some enterprising young students had set up a car wash to earn a little money.



Whew! Soon we were back to our safe, clean, if small hotel room & back to our civilization. Shake off the sad thoughts of how hateful people can be to each other. By the way, we did drive through some more middle class townships, they had mostly been established for the coloreds. One step up the ladder! Sim said that some people -like his parents, choose to still live on the fringes of their original townships even though they now have jobs & their homes are more middle class. They just don't want to leave their friends & neighbors. Oh yes and Joyce saw Flamingos in a canal on our way back to the hotel! None of the rest of us saw them unfortunately. Apparently they do migrate through Cape Town! And also notice that the parking lot is nearly empty again. The market place has been transformed once again!







That evening, after a short time to rest (& some folks got really cleaned up!!!), we met back downstairs to motor to our OAT sponsored Home Hosted dinner. They get volunteers from local middle class individuals who would like to invite the groups into their homes to meet & talk with local residents. OAT does pay these individuals a bit for allowing us into their homes. They divided us up 7 & 7 and each of us had one of the guides. George & I, John & Connie, Michael & Diana and Mr T visited with Marene & her friend Linda. Marene was single & had income from retirement from a factory job. Her friend Linda had been born & raised with her in District 6 & then Linda had escaped to marry & live in Toronto. She comes back to visit every couple of years. The home was pleasant & our Chicken curry was delightful. The conversation was lively & full of laughter. Great way to end very full day!

More later!!!!

Lots of love,

Pamela & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #33 Cape Peninsula Drive

Date: 1/14/2015

Good Afternoon Everyone!

So sorry to have this drag on. Had intended to be done long ago, but things just keep getting in the way! Certainly don't want to skip the last 2 days in Cape Town, they were too much fun!! So on with the tale!!







We were up at 6:15am and on the road before 8am. Had intended to beat the other vacationers, but soon ran into a stalled line of traffic and discovered from another tour bus making a u-turn that there was a fire up ahead that had the road closed. We never saw the fire, but the detour back through Cape Town took us an hour!! It was really really windy & cool. We passed the turn off for the Table Mountain Cable car & it was closed today!!! We had spectacular views of both Signal Mountain & Lion's Head.







We started in Cape Town City Center, made our way to the coast at Sea Point & followed the West Coast road all the way down to Cape Point. The little green line from Hout Bay to Noordhoek is a spectacular coast drive and is a Toll road. It runs through Table Mountain NP (which basically covers the entire peninsula!!). The road was originally hacked out of the vertical mountainside in 1915 and was considered an engineering marvel. There's been several bad rock slides through the years & it was opened as a Toll Road with lots of safety upgrades in 2005. Everyone that enters has to pay, but if you turn around at the halfway point (there are lots of picnic areas for day visits), they give you your money back! The views were incredible, but it was WINDY & COLD! Took us all by surprise. This is supposed to be summer! Most of us had not brought our coats, so we didn't hang around long!!! As a side note, at the start of the Chapman Peak Drive, there were some multi million dollar private homes actually built into the mountainside. They had incredible views across the gorgeous bay -BUT that community that is just visible at the tip is a Black Township. Can't imagine having THAT as a view from the comfort of your million dollar residence! Would that be disturbing or what?









Enjoyed the lovely drive.





After exiting the scenic toll road, the scenery started to change. Saw a few small RV's. Didn't ever see any actually on the road, but they are apparently around! Also saw warnings about Baboons. Apparently they really plague this residential area south of Cape Town, they are both destructive & dangerous. Worse than having bears, right? Because they are very smart & can open doors & windows & cans, etc. Will also kill & eat small animals (dogs? cats? small children?). Lots of retirement communities and kind of bedroom neighborhoods for Cape Town. It's much cheaper to live down this way, so lots of folks commute back & forth. Our guide said he **WOULD NOT** want to live under a constant threat from Baboons! From the safety of the tourist bus, they were cute!





The beaches were beautiful white sand & the Atlantic ocean looked clear (& cold!). Saw some kite surfers, but looked way way too rough out there, I think! You can just see the tops of the private residences right on the water!







After passing through Scarborough, the terrain really changed. We started to by pass an Ostrich farm & asked Sim to drive through, just in case we didn't get to see an Ostrich in the wild!!! It continued to get flatter & more barren.



Hard to think of them as dangerous. They look so sweet & furry!!



Soon arrived at Cape Point, a part of Table Mountain NP. So see that cute little Baboon on the entrance roof? I missed the excitement, but he was sitting up there drinking a bottled orange soda. Several of our group saw him grab it from an unsuspecting tourist, bound up on the roof, twist off the top & drink it down!!! What a stinker!!



While we were waiting to ride the Cape Point funicular (also known as the Flying Dutchman), up to the top, we watched a video. Decided to take a picture of the Painted Dogs (or Wild Dogs) as it didn't look like we'd get to see them in person! So sad! Came soooooo very close!!



It was not nearly as exciting as the Table Mountain Cable car, but still nice! Let us know that the views from the top would be AWESOME!!! The electric railway was put in use in December 1996 & was the first of it's kind in Africa. It is on a single track with a passing loop at mid point. It rises 285' to a height of 702'. Carry's 40 people per trip!



Learned a new word (not that I'll remember it very long!!) -fynbos is the term they use to describe the scrub bush vegetation that is common to this part of the Cape. The description of the funicular says it rises through dense fynbos! Take a look around -guess that's it!





From the Funicular station, it is a short walk up to the Old Lighthouse. Saw some animal skat on the way. Guess it's baboon?????





Woo Hoo! Views were fantastic! And it had warmed up, so very pleasant!! This is commonly advertised as the meeting point for the warm Current of the Indian ocean meet the cold Atlantic ocean. In fact it is really not, that's really a bit further south down towards Cape Agulhas, and there's really no line anyway, so you couldn't see it, but what the hey, it's still a wonderful view! Especially on such a gorgeous cloudless day! There are extremely strong & dangerous swells, that why there have been so many maritime disasters here. I spotted those dark shapes in the water down below & got excited that I was seeing whales.....nope, just rocks -more ALT, Animal Like Things!!!! Not the season for whales. They do migrate through here, but November I think?



Gorgeous, yes?





So wonderful! Bit windy, though, huh? And a few folks around!!



Got George standing by the old Lighthouse. It was replaced, because they decided it was at too high a point and caused ships to turn in too close to the shore too soon when rounding the point towards the east and being higher, it was often covered in fog. After the wreck of the Lusitania in 1911, they decided to build another lighthouse at a lower level!





There were lots of birds on the rocks down below -assume there were cormorants? And all sizes, shapes, colors, kinds, of wild flowers. You could just see the cliffs of the coastline to the east through the haze across False Bay.





Decided to walk down. Just to enjoy the views & the marvelous weather & the chance to walk a bit. Not much walking on this trip too many wile animals around during our safari times!





Animal sighting!!! These are Bontebok!! Another type of Antelope. This time I have Ken's magical zoom pictures to show you what it really looks like!!



And in the same view to the far right was an Ostrich!!! Cool! Again this is Ken's photo so you can see something other than a speck!!!









We tore ourselves away from Cape Point to make a short visit to Cape of Good Hope. Used to be thought to be the southern tip of Africa, but really just marks the point where a ship begins to travel more eastward than southward. Famous none the less & we can now put on our resume's that we were there!!!







Saw more Bontebok & Ostrich in this part of the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve! Wild & beautiful! Saw some plants that reminded us of the bottle bush in Australia! Must be part of the fynbos!!!!



Check out the long line of vehicles waiting to get in the park as we left!!!!





Now we drove along the east coast of the Peninsula. Think I'll stop here. We've still got lunch, penguins, & market shopping to cover! So goodnight for now! Hope you are still enjoying our trip! Hope it's making you want to visit on your own!!!

Lots of love,

Pamela & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #34 (Penguins & Market)

Date: 1/16/2015

Good Afternoon Dear Friends & Family,

We are still running along in Mesa with our full dance schedule. Trying to squeeze in a few moments here & there to finish telling of our final days in Africa! So I don't want to waste any time, lets go back to South Africa where I left us having just enjoyed the beautiful views of Cape Point & the Cape of Good Hope.



Do you remember the map of the Cape Peninsula? So we crossed over to drive along the east coast, overlooking False Bay. Made it almost to Simon's Town to stop for lunch.







The setting for the Black Marlin Seafood restaurant was beautiful!!! They cater to tour groups - large parking space for the tour buses & set menus that can be called in for quick service. Definitely a great choice, I'll have to give it a thumbs up on Trip Advisor!!







We had been offered a choice of either broiled hake (lovely white fish -can't believe I'm saying ANY fish was lovely!) or hake that was bacon wrapped. Sim advised us to take the bacon wrapped because of the way it was served. Most of us took him up on that (I figured the bacon would disguise the fact that I was eating fish!!) and were really glad we did. Have never seen anything served even remotely like this stand that looked like something used for a barbaric torture!! But it was actually delicious and made for a unique & fun experience. All the side dishes were good too (including the South African beer!).



Dazarine had opted for the plain broiled Hake & looks to be pleased that she did!!! Ha Ha!



The setting was beautiful & with the sun coming in warmly through the glass, it made for a nice and too relaxing setting -right Mr T?





We continued the drive up to Simon's Town, home of the South African Navy & population of about 7000 people. It's a pretty little town with some nice beaches.



We passed these adorable little girls that were dancing for everyone. Too cute. They all have squashed aluminum cans tied to their feet to jingle as they stomped!! Inventive!





A short walk from the parking lot got us to the raised walkways over the beautiful sandy beach. Mobbed with people, but the penguins (now called African Penguins -previously called Jackass Penguins due to their loud donkey like braying) paid us no mind at all! Totally unconcerned about our presence. So reading about this place on line -apparently a breeding pair of penguins showed up on this beach in 1982 and started the colony. They are about 3000 strong now! They have free run of the local area & some find wandering in the nearby residential neighborhood quite entertaining. They are protected and apparently cause the locals a bit of grief as they try to nest on porches, in garages, etc! They are not real car savvy either, so the folks have to be really watchful!







We could have stayed there for hours watching their adorable antics! Especially fun watching them swim up onto the beach. There were some almost grown juveniles that still have their downy feathers and some were molting & looked a bit ragged!!





It was quite windy there (and a little cool) and I watched one penguin hard a work digging himself a burrow. He was spraying sand everywhere!







The couple on the sandy mound were have a romantic interlude -not concerned about all the nearby peeping Toms!





Lots of them were sunning on the Boulders (namesake of the beach). The waves would wash them up and then they'd just climb up on the rocks.







George happened to spot this one guy moving with obvious purpose from the main beach area back into the shrubs. Soon we saw why! He had apparently left his significant other in their nest and came back to discover her dilly dallying with a rival!!! A big fight broke out between the males

(why the girl slipped away unnoticed!). At least that's my interpretation! I have a cute video of the episode! Need to put music & narrative to it!!



Unfortunately, it was soon time to move on. It would be a pretty long drive back to Cape Town. The little girls were still hard at work entertaining!!



We could just get a glimpse of all the Navy vessels in port. Our guide said that they occasionally allowed tours of the ships, but we don't have time today!



Drove back up the eastern edge & could see the well populated valley as we gained altitude. Lots of folks in the area!











Made it back to our hotel & took a quick freshen up before deciding to head down & do a quick bit of shopping in the market before they finished tearing it down for the evening. The table cloth was really apparent on the mountain! I'm not much on buying souvenirs, but had carried several t-shirts which I had been told were useful for bartering. I think I had mentioned that I used 2 of them in Victoria Falls to purchase some Zimbabwe trillions!! Anyway, they weren't really useful here, I was looking at the brightly colored tops & none of the shop keepers wanted the t-shirts at all. I ended up getting the best price I could get with cash (about \$15 each) and just gave the shopkeepers the t-shirts just so I wouldn't have to take them home with me! Had some fun with one of the workers. She overheard me saying that I couldn't believe they worked so hard in putting up and taking down their stalls every day. She spoke up and said, "yes, but when I give you a price for something -you would say -no, that's too much!" I got to bartering with her and decided on 2 tops for \$15 each. She laughingly said -you should give me a t-shirt as a New Year's gift. I laughed too and headed off -at that time, I still thought I might use it for purchasing something. I found that I was not getting anywhere with it, so decided I would take it back to her after all. Found the shop & she wasn't there. I asked for her & they called her on the cell phone so that she could come back & receive my "gift!" She was thrilled & we had a nice laugh together while she thanked me for my generosity! It was a fun moment!

FORK

PARTY
& Workshop (including service)

Cured ham and onion croquettes

Deep fried goats'cheese with sun-dried tomato biscuits and port and onion marmalade

Baby gem leaves filled with cos lettuce, black olives, walnuts and gorgonzola dressing

Puff pastry parcels with sautéed mushrooms and parmesan

Smoked salmon rolls with goats'cheese, dill and salmon caviar served on crostini

Artichoke & pecorino salad with balsamic dressing

Seared tuna with tatsoi salad, Asian sun-dried tomato dressing and guacomole

Grilled tiger prawns wrapped with pancetta

Beef fillet on croutons and mushrooms with crisp onion rings and red wine sauce

Moroccan meatballs

French fries

Flourless chocolate cake





Michael, Diana, Walt, & Janie had found this really neat restaurant only a block from the hotel, so we all went out together for dinner. It was tappas (lots of bite size appetizers) style & was YUMMY! Good find & perfect for our free night out! We had invited Mr T & we all pitched in and bought him a thank you meal! Daz had elected not to join us -said she wanted McDonald's instead!



Made it back to our hotel room before dark, but after the market place was totally torn apart!

Amazing! And so ended our next to the last day! Only one more touring day left!!! Don't want to leave & even hate to give up reliving it!!

More soon!

Lots of love,

Pamela & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #35 (Wine Country)
Date: 1/17/2015

Good Morning Friends & Family,

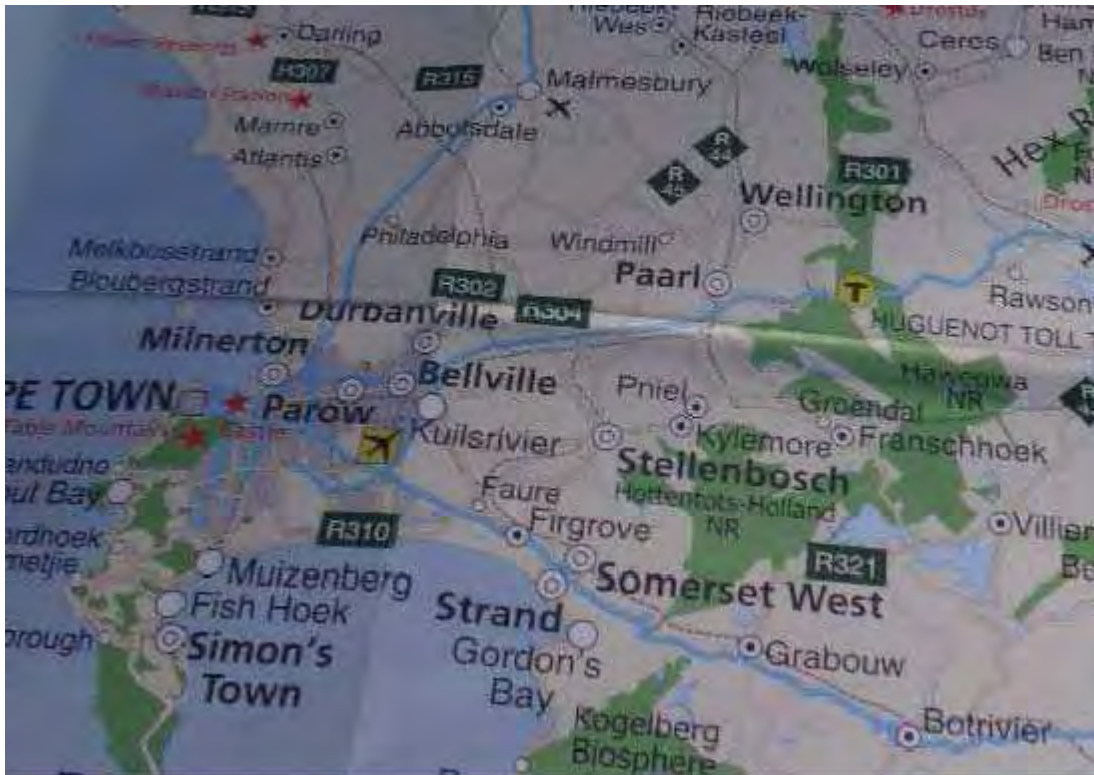
I've come to the full day in Africa! I don't want to waste any time with small chitchat!!







Morning dawned bright & beautiful. This was New Year's Eve!!! A little later to breakfast this morning & there were even serving ladles in the fruit & yogurt. The hot breakfast was very fortifying!







After breakfast, we loaded into our fine little Mercedes tour bus with maps in hand & headed almost due east to Stellenbosch, the heart of South Africa's wine country. First we had a glimpse of the ever present Table Mountain (had a table cloth over much of it again & very windy!) and then the long sobering drive past the townships. How long would it take for this reality to become acceptable?







We soon started to see lots of signs of the fertile farm lands with grape vines, orchards, & vineyards. But it was too soon to stop for a wine tasting, so we drove on!







First stop was the center of Stellenbosch, a town about 31 miles east of Cape Town, established in 1679 by Simon van der Stel, the Governor of the Cape Colony. He named it after himself, literally means Stel's Bush. He had trees planted throughout the city along the streets & at the homesteads, so it also became known as the City of Oaks.









We were supposed to be investigating the historic Dutch architecture which is on the National Registry and has now been transformed into interesting gift shops, but we soon found ourselves amusing ourselves by being a bit silly! Actually spent nearly 15 minutes in this goofy gift shop that sold outrageously crazy items. Nearly bought a risqué bottle opener for friends in Mesa, but managed to locate a bit of restraint!



The girls had been giving George a difficult time about buying diamonds for me in honor of our 25th anniversary. I actually stepped into a true Diamond Gallery, but decided that I didn't need to ask for a 2nd mortgage on our RV just for a silver anniversary, so found a reasonable gift shop & purchased a nice pair of silver Hippo earrings & a silver pendant in the shape of the African continent, each with a tiny tiny little South African diamond chip! Fun shopping anyway!



Sure enjoyed looking at all the lovely carvings, especially of the Giraffes, but decided they would be way way to hard to transport back to Mesa! Sure would look good in Tom's new Dance Hall though!!!







Soon our hour of wandering was over & we found our guides waiting for us at a nice bar open to the street. John just had to sample one of the local beers, getting warmed up for our wine tasting!!







Short drive to Solms Delta, the first winery to visit on our tour. Almost looks like the Superstition Mountains in the distance, huh?





This winery also had a small history museum and were working on a Musical Instrument museum. The young lady that gave us an introductory talk was very enthusiastic & entertaining. She is a member of the family that has lived in this area for generations. Prof Mark Solms, who currently owns the Winery is busy not only growing the vineyard, but excavating the area of the homestead that has not only been around since 1690, but archeological finds seem to indicate that hunter/gatherers have been there for more than 6000 years. His method of wine making is also unusual as he practices desiccation of the grapes, basically strangling the bunches on the vine while they ripen. Apparently this practice dates back to the early Greek Wine Growers!! She also gave us a short demonstration of 2 different ancient musical instruments. Quite fun, but not enough of a beat that we could dance to it!!





Sim then lead us to a lovely picnic area & we got to taste 7 wines!





We convinced Daz to even try the dryer red wines. As you can see, she was not overly impressed, although she was quite a bit more talkative after she had tasted them!!



George, on the other hand, was rather pleased with them!!









After a lovely relaxing time outdoors, they loaded us back into the bus for a short drive through the vines & to the production building. Not a large operation in comparison to other wineries we have visited, but clean & fairly advanced. They exported quite a large number of bottles for such a small farm. I don't really remember the tour being comedic, but the group was in a giggly mood! Must have been the wine!!







Next stop was the little town of Franschhoek (renowned as the culinary capital of the Cape Winelands) for lunch. This town was established by the Huguenots (the above monument was built in 1945 in their honor). Although we were responsible for purchasing our own lunch, our guide suggested we eat together at the French Connection Bistro. The food was really very good (rivalled as the very best of on trip!), but a bit expensive for lunch. Didn't phase any of us though, after all we were spending monopoly money, right?









After lunch we wandered up & down the main street, looking at the museum, church, flowers & the little market, but it had gotten very hot -probably the hottest day we had experienced on the trip & we were all pleased to get back in our bus, although the air conditioning in it did not work especially well!!









Our last scheduled stop on the tour was the Grande Provence Estate. It is one of the many wineries that can be visited on the Franschhoek Wine Tram -a hop on hop off tram in the local area. Several folks doing the tasting were taking advantage of it. Nice idea!!



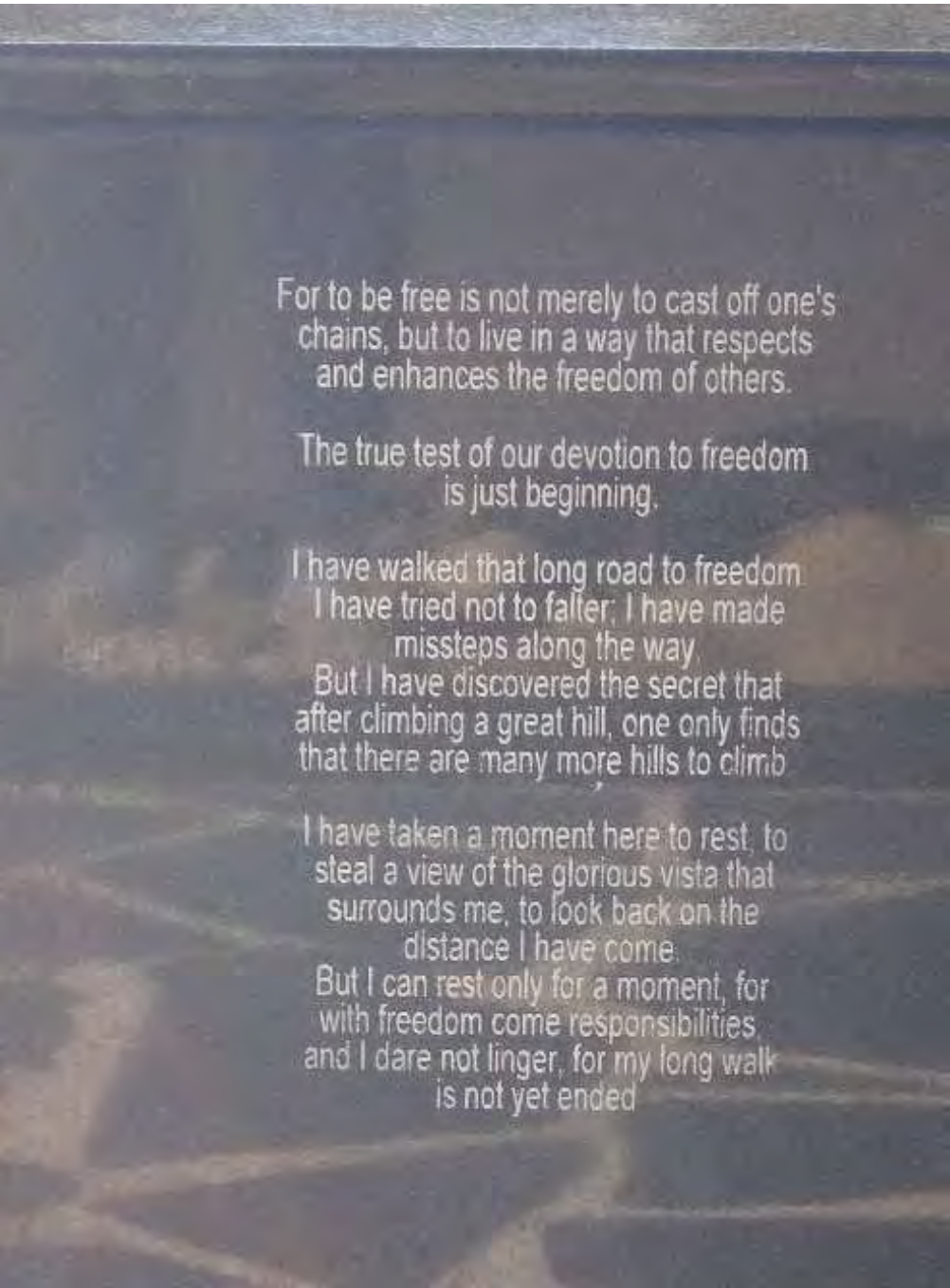






This particular wine tasting was okay, but not particularly memorable, although the estate itself was gorgeous! George & I were separated from the group by a cash register, so although I got lots of pictures of the folks chattering & talking, we didn't get to participate! And the wine pourer's were all business & not inclined to chat! Wouldn't go there again! By the way, note Connie holding up the Lay's Potato Chips! All of us had started craving some plain old American junk food!!





For to be free is not merely to cast off one's
chains, but to live in a way that respects
and enhances the freedom of others.

The true test of our devotion to freedom
is just beginning.

I have walked that long road to freedom
I have tried not to falter; I have made
missteps along the way
But I have discovered the secret that
after climbing a great hill, one only finds
that there are many more hills to climb

I have taken a moment here to rest, to
steal a view of the glorious vista that
surrounds me, to look back on the
distance I have come.
But I can rest only for a moment, for
with freedom come responsibilities
and I dare not linger, for my long walk
is not yet ended

On the drive back into town, Sim made a quick stop at the Drakenstein Correctional Centre, a low security prison (formerly called Victor Verster Prison) that held Nelson Mandela for 14 months before his final release on 11 February 1990. Daz posed for a picture in front of the Memorial built in his honor. What an amazing man. Thank God for people of his caliber. Watched the movie about his life, "The Long Walk to Freedom" on the plane enroute. Should read the book too. On the way back, I watched Invictus. Both are excellent. He died a year ago on Dec 5, 2013 at the age of 95.



Made it back to our hotel room & had a crystal clear sky over Table Mountain!!











After a short rest, we met Mr T downstairs & decided that 6 of us: George & I, John & Connie, and Ken & Sue would walk to the water front & join in the free New Year's Eve celebration sponsored by the city. Mike & Diana, Daz & Joyce, and Walt & Diana decided to hang closer to the hotel, hoping to see the annual parades. As we got closer to the waterfront, we ran into more & more people! It was really exciting. Folks were very well behaved, the city did not allow drinking in most areas. We did find a restaurant with a street bar & sat on the steps by a memorial to the 4 South African Nobel Peace Prize winners -Nelson Madela, FW de Klerk, Desmond Tutu, & Albert Lutuli. Spent an hour or so resting there & watching the crowds surge to & fro!









About 11:30pm Mr T found us a place to stand where we could see the fireworks display. AWESOME!! Wonderful end to the most fabulous vacation & a very suitable celebration for our 25th anniversary! Absolutely fabulous! The 20 minute walk back to the hotel was uneventful & we got to listen to a passing parade from our hotel room while we shared a final glass of wine, toasting each other!!

I'll do one more travelogue to bring us back home!!!

Thanks for hanging in there with us!

Happy New Year to you all!!!

Lots of love,

Pamela & George

Subj: AS, Dec 2014 #36 (Heading home!)

Date: 1/17/2015

Hi Guys,

So this will do it! Ready for the long trip back to Mesa!!!



Last morning to wake up & see the beautiful Table Mountain view -heavy tablecloth this morning! And the market's set up even though the city was partying until the wee hours of the morning! And amazingly enough the streets were clean! Expected to see trash everywhere, but not so! Must have had the street sweepers out early early!





As we had on the entire trip, everyone was one time & ready to go! Mr T was very happy!



We have a beautiful clear day with a bit of wind to start our travels!



Only had about an hour to wait in the Cape Town Airport.





Took a couple of goodbye pictures from the South African take off from Johannesburg. Landed there about 3:15pm and used that time to say bye to Tinashe. He stayed with us up until we had to go through Security. He had missed the last flight to Zimbabwe, so he'd spend the night and then get to fly home to be with his family for a few months. Figure after putting up with the likes of us for 3 weeks, he needed it!! What an incredible guide he's been. Hope things go well for him and that we get to see him in the US someday! One interesting thing, we had another security check after we were at the gate! Seemed to be a spur of the moment random check. Didn't cause us any grief, but they did make anyone who had purchased liquid in the airport throw it out!





We had a refueling & crew change stop in Dakar, Senegal. It was dark when we landed there this time. Enroute, we had all seen a statute of some kind out the window. I Googled it and found out it is a 49m tall bronze statue overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. It was built by a North Korean company dedicated 4 April 2010 on Senegal's National Day to commemorate their 50th anniversary of their liberation from France. It is the tallest statue in Africa! I had asked several folks about it while we were in Africa and no one knew anything about it! I was glad to find it on the internet! As an on the side, the locals do not like it, claim it is an eyesore & waste of money by then President Abdoulaye Wade. None of us were particularly thrilled with a stop there anyway, but no problems and now we can say we've been there, although minus the t-shirt! Security came on after about 20 people got off the plane & they went over their seats very carefully. Also made everyone take everything out of the overhead bins and anything left unclaimed was taken off the plane. Very interesting!







Took several photos for the landing & departure from Denver. Just to have proof that some places still have snow!!! Such nasty stuff!! There had been cold & snow in Dulles too, but didn't get pictures!



And one last photo -there's Camel Back Mountain! We've made it back to Mesa!!!

Thanks so much for hanging with us on our vacation. Hope you enjoyed it! Let me know if I am causing any grief with sending them to you and I'll gladly take you off the list. Next vacation will be in April when we travel from Budapest to Bucharest with Uniworld. Looking forward to it, although it can't possibly compete with this one! My next project will be to get my photos labeled & on Shutterfly. And to try & do a Photo book! Happy New Year everyone! We love you,

Pamela & George