

Karen's 60th birthday trip to Africa!

Monday, Aug 12, 2019

Mari Bercaw picked us up at 1:15 pm on a sunny warm day. Arrived about 2 pm and had a quick easy checkin with Emirates airline. We're traveling with three duffel bags and a backpack, each weighing about 15 pounds. The carry on limit is 15 pounds each. Arrived at gate 516 about 3:00. Our flight is at 5.

The TV volume is obnoxious. I'm wearing earplugs and noise cancelling headphones and I can still hear the laugh track.

Many East Indian people on our flight. Also there are many people arriving in wheelchairs.

The plane crew members are from 12 countries and speak 11 languages! They gave out designer swag bags with socks, eye mask, earplugs, toothbrush, and toothpaste.

Delicious dinner of chicken in a shrimp and soybean sauce, and rhubarb custard crumble. I can't seem to read much on flights so I watched two movies that have been on my list: On the Basis of Sex, and the new A Star is Born. Then I slept for about 4 hours. Somewhere in there they served a snack of pizza, which I declined. Breakfast was a choice of eggs or Indian.

The guy next to me slept the entire flight. He had a bad cold but kept his

head covered with a blanket, so hopefully none of us around him will get sick.

I loved having an aisle seat to get up easily and move around, and have easier access to my stuff!

We flew a 777-300. The economy seats felt more comfortable and a bit roomier than usual. Flight cameras let you see the view below and ahead.

The flight was ≈ 13.5 hours, about an hour less than expected. I never came close to misery like I usually do on long flights.

Dubai airport is huge. It is a "silent" airport - no PA or TVs! It was practically empty when we arrived, perhaps because this is the off season for tourism (due to the summer heat).

We breezed through passport control (no baggage to claim, as it's checked through to Cape Town).

If your ~~long~~ layover is more than 8 hours, Emirates gives you a free hotel room, buffet meals, and even a sim card, if you want.

We landed just before 1pm and were at the hotel ~~at 6:30~~ ^{about 1:30}. Nice room with two large ~~beds~~ beds. The buffet dinner was amazing, with Indian dishes of all kinds, a meze spread with the creamiest hummus, and a dessert table with baklava and much more.

Grant did not sleep on the flight so he went up to the room while I took a 2-hour tour on a small bus with a few other people. The Phillipino guide was named Jason. The tour ran from 7:30 - 9:30 pm (they also had one from 10-12). This is a very international city - 85% of its 3 million residents are foreigners. English is the common language.

Dubai at night looks like a combination of Bladerunner and Las Vegas, with futuristic buildings and brightly lit billboards. The main highway is 7 lanes. Everything is ultra-modern, clean, and high tech. There's an almost full moon in a slightly hazy sky.

First we went to see the Jumeirah mosque in the Jumeirah neighborhood, where only locals (Emiratis) may live. Foreigners can't own land here, only 99-year leases, like on our Indian reservations.

100° and humid outside the van!

The gas stations and stores look the same as the US, with the addition of Arabic lettering. Saw a KFC delivery moto.

Jason says they don't use solar or wind here, just oil, and are building a nuclear plant.

Saw the palace of the ruler of Dubai, who also runs Emirates airline.

next stop was Jumeirah beach, with a view of Burj al Arab, a sail-shaped hotel.

Today is the last day of Eid-al-Adha, the muslim Feast of the Sacrifice, a 3-day holiday and the biggest celebration of the year. Lots of families out walking.

80% of water comes from desalination plants. Landscaping water is recycled. Oil revenue is 5% of GDP. Tourism and business generate the rest.

Next stop was Palm Jumeirah, a man-made island with luxury residences and hotels. An 11-km boardwalk borders the island. Villas here run in the \$10 million range.

Last stop was a view of the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, and the Dubai mall. We did not go in either one, just saw them from the outside, which was enough for me.

Back to hotel at 9:30, cash about 11. Slept well despite thick foam pillow. Up and wide awake at 4:30, but mostly on local time. The room was dark & quiet.

Wed Aug 14

Thick yogurt (labneh), muesli, and watermelon for breakfast. Shuttle to airport at 6:30. The delights of a quiet airport can not be overestimated. Feels so much less hectic. 97° and hazy air.

Long bus ride from gate to plane was quite warm. Loading stair railing too

hot to touch.

Several men in the airport with what looked like multiple wives.

Smooth nine-hour flight to Cape Town. Two good meals. The flight dragged a little toward the end but wasn't too bad.

Landed in CT about 4:45^{pm}, breezed through passport control, baggage claim, & customs. Were very happy to see our checked bags arrive.

~~Hi~~ The first thing I noticed when we got off the plane were all the black people. My brain did a double take: oh yeah, we're in South Africa now, not Arabia.

Our AirBnB had booked an airport shuttle - \$26 ~~for 2 taxis~~ total (400 rand). Arrived at the apartment about 6 and were met by Cameron. Lovely soft sunset, salt air, sound of waves across the street. We're paying just under \$100 a night with all the taxes & fees. I think the apt. is \$62.

Dinner at Pulp on Point one block away. \$10 total for burger, sandwich, sweet potato fries, & leftovers.

Unpack & crash!

Weather luck: winter here & has been cold & rainy the past few days but forecast for our time here is sunny & warm! 16° @ 7 pm.

Thurs Aug 15

52° and sunny at 8 am! Gorgeous view of light house, trail, and ocean.

I walked over to Pulp for a green smoothie. At 9 we went out front to catch an Uber. After 20 minutes of trying to get it to scan our credit card, we finally realized we could use Paypal. Less than \$8 for a 20-minute ride to the Rondebosch neighborhood where we met old friend Margaret Barrie. She moved to England last year but was serendipitously in Cape Town for her brother's memorial. She's staying with friends who live at a boys' school called Bishops College in a beautiful old house filled with antiques.

Her sister-in-law, Mariana, showed up about 10 and we drove along the coast to Simonstown to see the penguins. It cost about \$15 each entrance fee. It's a wild colony but feels a bit like a zoo because there are boardwalks for viewing, and man-made nest boxes. Still it was a thrill to see a colony up close, with downy chicks, waddling adults, and swimming acrobatics. Areas of the colony were quite aromatic with guano. The coast is beautiful, with granite boulders & turquoise water. A calm, warm, sunny day. Lots of tourists. The penguins were formerly called jackass penguins because their loud vocalizations sound like donkeys braying.

We had a pricey lunch at the adjacent restaurant with a view of the bay and kayakers. Fresh-caught grilled white fish & salad was about \$18 each.

Next we drove to Cape Point National Park to see the Cape of Good Hope. Park entrance fee about \$15 each. The vegetation is called fynbos (pronounced fainboss), with proteas, ericas, and succulents. Flowers just starting to bloom.

Lots of people at the cape. You can walk up or take the funicular for \$6 each. Sweeping view from the top of False Bay, the cape, and the mountains. Many signs warn to beware of baboons, but we didn't see any. (On the drive up we saw a "shark spotter" looking down on a swimming beach. If they see a shark they ~~are~~ radio to someone who sounds a siren to get people out of the water.)

It's disconcerting being on the left side of the road. Glad I wasn't driving!

Came back up the west side of the cape on the stunning & hair-raising mt. Chapman Road, a cliff-hanging engineering marvel.

Back to our apartment about 5:30, and goodbye to Margaret & Mariana. Grabbed a few breakfast things at a store, then dinner at Pulp. Hightoday 68°. Grateful for solar gain.

in the apartment because the only heat is a propane heater we're nervous to use for fear of carbon monoxide.

Lots of tiny ants on the table.

Saw hadeda (rhymes with "ladida") ibis today. They make loud cackling noises, like women gossiping. Also saw red-winged starlings, which are pretty because they're native here (unlike our invasive starlings).

Pine, gum, palm, and other trees were introduced here, and are a challenge to eradicate until native trees can be grown in enough size & quantity.

The current (Zulu) ruler of S. Africa is apparently quite corrupt, and many people fear for future stability.

Although Cape Town is safe, we were cautioned to stay aware and to never let our credit card out of our sight.

Sunrise here at 34° south is at 7:30 and sunset at 6:15.

Friday Aug 16

Up (awake) at 5:30. The granola from nearby Newport Deli is delicious. Long walk on the promenade. Sunshine, surf washing over rocks, kelp sparkling, neon orange-billed

oystercatchers, workers sweeping, joggers sweating. Gauzy skin of clouds draped over table mountain. Walked west for half an hour or so and came back through Green Point Park, a green oasis with ponds and an interesting biodiversity garden.

Back at the apartment we flung the windows wide for a view of the ocean, maybe 100 yards away. We can hear the surf. It's a perfect day: warm, sunny, no wind.

After a picnic lunch at the apartment we Uber'd to Table Mountain and took the cable car to the top. Our Uber driver was very friendly and half-jokingly invited us to visit his home. That would probably be interesting but awkward.

I'm glad I didn't know how steep the cable car trip is or I might not have gone! You rise 2500' and it feels practically straight up! The floor rotates 360°, giving those brave enough to open their eyes a panoramic view. The Uber driver called the clouds on top of the mountain a "table cloth."

The top is at 3500'. It was cold and windy up there, so we did the shorter loop walk, ogled the amazing scenery, took some pics, and headed down.

From there we Uber'd to Greenmarket Square, with dozens of vendors selling

crafts from all over Africa. Many beautiful things, but were not ready to buy. The vendors weren't too pushy, but there were many panhandlers and down & out looking people. There were tourist police around. We wore our backpacks in front.

After finding a pharmacy for naproxen & granola bars, we Uber'd back to Mouille Point about 5:00. Bought bread, cheese, salami, & barley salad at the deli and ate at the apartment.

The wind is now howling and waves are crashing over the promenade.

Saturday Aug 17

The wind howled through the night, and we awoke at 7 to a calm day, blue sky, and gentle surf. Uber'd to Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens on the slope of Table Mountain, where we spent a delightful four hours meandering through gorgeous swaths of South African trees and flowers with views of the mountain and not a cloud in sight. Saw a cape sugarbird and a brilliant double-collared sunbird, plus guinea fowl and Egyptian geese. Many flowers blooming, including proteas and daisies.

Back at the apartment Grant rested while I joined the throngs on the Sea Point promenade. It's 70° today! I love this area and am so glad we stayed here by the sea and not in town. Uber rides have been running up to \$8 depending on how far.

We realized today that because we're in the southern hemisphere, the sun is north, not south. We also have to be careful crossing the street to first look right, not left.

Last meal at Pulp on Point. Love their food + prices. Had a bacon, avo, tomato, feta wrap with pesto mayo for 59 rand, less than \$4. Yum!! Stunning red sunset + mist rolling in. Silhouettes of container ships coming + going from the nearby harbor.

Sunday, Aug. 1

Up at 5, light at 7, 61°, mist burning off. Showered (quickly due to water shortage here - although they have had some good rains this winter and reservoirs are over 80% full). Packed, finished off the rest of the delicious granola from Newport Deli, and went for a long walk on the promenade as the sun rose crimson through the mist. Light breeze, perfect walking weather. Women's race began and hundreds of women streamed

past in pink tutus, super woman shirts, and other "woman power" costumes.

Grant's blood sugar went low and I ran back to get food. Meanwhile the glucose tabs had kicked in so he started walking back. We missed each other and I ran all the way back to where he had been waiting, before getting a text that he had made it all the way back to the park. Next time I'll just wait with him while the tabs kick in, which takes about 20 min. I don't like being separated when he's low b/c he can't think clearly.

Strong wind kicked up and clouds rolled in. Glad we did Table Mt + garden already!

Said goodbye to the apartment at 10:00 and uber'd to Once In Cape Town, our tour hostel on Kloop St. in the Gardens neighborhood. Our driver, Boaz, was a super friendly older man from Zimbabwe, who told us that crime is high in South Africa because people are bitter about apartheid, and are undereducated because they were kept that way. He also said the police impound Uber cars that don't have a metering permit, but that the permits can take three years to get. He applied last year and hasn't received his.

The hostel is great. Our room has a king size bed, two desks, private bath, and a view of the mountain. It's sunny & warm down here (though windy) but the mountain wears a wreath of clouds. The shower has a two-minute hourglass timer. There is a guitar in the common area and it felt great to play. There's a cafe with salads and sandwiches. We split a hummus wrap for lunch.

Then we walked to the colorful Bo-Kaap neighborhood. On the way, a man stopped us and said the street was closed for filming and we needed to get a free ticket to go through. But the shop he indicated had no idea what we were talking about. We never did see any closed streets, although we did see some backlot trailers.

The neighborhood is indeed colorful, if a bit twisty. We were delighted to hear muezzins singing the call to prayer.

Grant developed a new blister on his heel so we uber'd back for some down time.

We met our tour group at 6, and there are only 10 of us! Our leader is a cheerful, friendly young man named Martin. ~~Four~~ Six Aussies, two Kiwis, and us. 4 men, 6 women. 2 couples. Age range ~30 to ~70.

Our room is right above a bar playing loud music. Thank goodness for earplugs!

This hostel is busy & hip - lots of happy young people.

Dinner at Stacked Diner a block away. I had a yummy chicken burger for about \$4.

Mon Aug 19

The big day at last! The hostel includes a nice breakfast of coffee, juice, fruit, and choice of yogurt and granola or croissant with butter, jam, & cheese. Had a nice chat with Deb and Rosemary, both from Queensland.

It's a blue, sunny day.

I walked across the street to ~~have~~ ~~a chat~~ buy a few things at the pharmacy. At 10 we began loading the bus. We were happy to see that the lockers were more than twice as big as expected. We're on an old bus today, but will switch at the Namibian border. Apparently they keep SA trucks in SA - something to do with licensing or road taxes.

We're enjoying the British vocabulary: chemist, plasters, torch for pharmacy, band-aids, flashlight.

At 11 we were on the road. After navigating the sprawling industrial outskirts of the city (I think it's about 3 million?) we were into a

country, with cows, sheep, and fields of grain and canola.

Picnic lunch on the bus of yummy sandwiches from the hostel (they use a lot of a green called rocket, which I think might be aragula).

Break at a gas station in Piketburg. Then into country that looked like the American west, with rock outcroppings, and vegetation that looks similar to sage & juniper. Brilliant swaths of orange, yellow, & white daisies.

I chose the sunny side of the bus and it was quite warm.

We arrived at our camp about 3:30. I think it's called Highlanders. It's a vineyard. After setting up our tents some of the group went for wine tasting. There's a small pool, a bar, and room for quite a few tents on flat grass.

I helped Godfrey, the cook, chop vegetables. Our driver is John. Godfrey, John, and Martin are all Kikuyu, from Kenya.

Dinner was excellent: a beef stew with onion, tomato, & green pepper; sauteed veggies with garlic; steamed cabbage with butter & salt. The bathrooms are spacious & clean with showers and big counters. There are two other overland trucks here: one camping and one staying in bungalows.

Before dinner we learned how to set up

the tents. They are heavy, heavy-duty canvas. Big enough for two mattresses and our gear bags, but no room to move around, so getting dressed is a challenge.

There's a tree with probably 100 weaver bird nests hanging from it. The birds are bright yellow.

The moon is waning now after being full while we were in Cape Town. Lots of stars, and it got quite chilly.

Hygiene is key: we have to wash our hands before eating or washing dishes. We all help wash (2 washes, 2 rinses) and "flap" dishes to dry them.

Tues Aug 20

Up at 6, pack the truck, yummy crepes for breakfast. Rosemary told us about a dish called "Zucchini Slice" - basically a grated zucchini casserole.

On the road at 8. More treeless scrub, American West landscape. Today we sat toward the back, which was more comfortable. Martin answered my many questions. Minimum wage in SA is \$100/month.

Lots of pied cows (black + white), a few animals that looked like antelope,

some birds that might have been sacred ibis.

Stopped in Bitterfontein for gas. Not until later did we realize it was our only stop to see flowers (there weren't too many there, but there were loads farther down the road and we could only take pictures through the window). There were white, yellow, orange, pink, purple, crimson, magenta-gorgeous. They were mostly along the roadside, where there isn't grazing. Lots of sheep, cows, & goats today.

Many rounded boulders, like Joshua Tree, and large smooth rock hills, that I think are called "balds" in the American South.

Arrived in the town of Springbok at noon. Had a mediocre fast-food lunch at Wimpys and bought snacks at Spar market. 73° and breezy.

Afrikaans is the primary language in SA, followed by Xhosa(?), then English. Lots of Afrikaans spoken in Springbok and few white faces. It felt very different from Cape Town, and from anywhere we've been. This is basically an agriculture center.

Leaving town the roadsides were littered with broken glass and plastic.

Small aloe-leaved trees appeared here and there. As we neared the border it got flatter and sandier.

At the Namibian border we first went into the SA departure to get our

Then Martin took our passports to be checked by someone, we waited in the truck and it was very hot.

passports stamped. ~ Then we drove across the Orange River to the Namibian border station. Saw a maribou ~~stork~~ stork in the river. It was hot. Namibian immigration was quick & easy. They checked us for ebola by shooting our forehead temperature.

After a few stops for gas and cooking fuel, while roasting in the truck, we arrived at Felix Unite Camp at 6 pm. It's a lovely oasis on the river, with lighted cooking shelters, flat & grassy tent area, bar, pool, hot showers.

Dinner: cheesy mashed potatoes, chicken drumsticks, sauteed veggies. Lovely temperature & no bugs.

Wed. Aug 21

overslept til 7, having frustration dreams (happens when I sleep too long). Rushing to get packed up before breakfast. Feeling a bit crabby. French toast & ham-style bacon plus papaya & bananas (also cold cereal available).

No one opted for the #35 two-hour canoe trip. It's too pleasant to hang out on shore, stretching our legs and looking for birds, with the sight and sound of the river flowing past.

Saw mousebirds, one-eyes, irridscent

Kingfishers, herons, rust & white geese, black & white-winged cormorants, and many more. Bird song all around. Many trees, including some type of feathery, long-needled pine.

Many of the black workers singing. The air is super dry, sucking moisture out of skin and hair.

lunch at 11: pasta, hot dogs, salad. On the road at 12:30. Passed an irrigation project with acres of vineyards and 100s of thatch worker huts baking in the hot sun.

Women walking along the road with large bundles of thatch on their heads.

Today we got a new truck, which is in better shape than our old one. In particular the windows & seatbelts work.

Our destination was Fish River Canyon, a couple of hours down gravel & dirt roads. Martin calls bumpy roads an "African massage." Lots of dust. A few cactus and albatrees (quiver trees), but mostly no vegetation, just dry expanses of sand & rock. Reminded me of parts of Death Valley.

Aussie word of the day: eski (means cooler).

Arrived at Hobas campground about 3. Left at 4 to drive 10k on a washboard road to the canyon. Walked about 45 min. along the rim to a viewpoint. It's not as colorful or deep as the Grand Canyon, and there's no vegetation by the river (which is seasonal).

Watched the sunset and then back to camp for squash soup, pork chops, jojos, and sauteed veggies, all delicious.

There were dozens of people watching the sunset and many languages being spoken. There were about a dozen vehicles, large and small.

It was a warm night. Saw the southern cross. No bugs and we had a small fire. Bed by 9.

Thurs Aug 22 7.5 hrs driving

Up at 5, brekkie at 6:30, on the road at 7:00. Omelettes + cereal today.

Saw many ostrich today, plus oryx (gemsbok), springbok, and a giraffe and two zebra that may not have been wild. (Martin says they were wild.)

Palm orchards irrigation project and more vineyards. Mostly dirt roads today and some paved. On the paved road the fog lines were yellow and the center lines white (opposite of the US).

Traditional thatched roofs are thick + tidy. Martin says they only last about 1.5 years. They're made from a tall grass called "yellow grass" that does not grow in this area.

Three hours to Bethanie, a small settlement with a small store. Toilets cost 2 rand (14 cents). Luckily Rosemary had change she shared. The store sold "drinking yogurt," which I hope to try.

One ~~more~~ more hour to Helming's hausen, arriving 11:30. It's a former German town, now a hotel and restaurant with a beautiful garden and pricey German food. Their specialty is apple cake at \$4 a slice.

There is a surprising amount of tourism and traffic out here in the Namibian hinterlands. We saw many campgrounds and hotel camps.

Saw two adorable rock hyrax in rock piles at the lunch stop, and several brilliant crimson-breasted shrike.

Lunch was salad, rice, cheese, beets, bread, mandarins, and papaya (aka pawpaw).

No AC on the bus but high windows let in a cool breeze when we're moving.

There are miles of fence for sheep, cows, and goats.

Three^{to} ~~four~~ more hours of driving on very bumpy roads. We all felt like blender drinks. Made one stop for those who needed a "bush toilet." The scenery grew nicer, with wrinkled red hills and sweeping debris slopes dotted with

acacia.

Arrived at our camp in Sessriem at 4:30. It has a large bar/restaurant area, a small pool, and many people camping, including quite a few private vehicles. A hot day but it's cooling off as the sun goes down.

Huge sociable weaver bird nests in the trees. Red-eye bulbul flitting about. I saw pale grey hawks on ~~the~~ utility poles. Flaming red sunset through the acacia trees. All the camps so far have had potable water. They've also had flush toilets, which surprises me since water ~~was~~ ~~was~~ ~~was~~ ~~was~~ ~~was~~ I thought was at such a premium.

Spaghetti and veggies for dinner. Godfrey has a way with veggies.

Not a chilly evening, in fact it was so warm in the tent we left the flap open. Loud bar noise until late. Helicopters & planes coming in from sightseeing. Balloon rides available here. Windy.

Friday Aug. 23

Up at 5. Cool but not cold. On the bus at 6:20 waiting for the gate to open at 6:30.

Drove a half hour or so on ~~to~~ a paved road to Dune 45, so-called because it's 45 miles from Sessriem. Parked with a lot of other vehicles and trudged

up a steep dune to watch the sunrise. As in Morocco, the sunrise itself was nothing spectacular as far as the sand changing colors, but it's a cool time of day temperature-wise, and it's a beautiful place, with coral-colored dunes contrasting with gray flats, and the interplay of shapes & shadows. Dune color most vibrant at dawn.

We had breakfast there: eggs & flavorful beans.

Next we drove to Sossusvlei, 15 minutes or so. Oryx nuzzling around the parking lot! Magnificent animals. Then we climbed into 9-person 4-wheel drive jaloopies for a high-speed slalom through the sand to another parking area. From there we walked about 20 minutes through the sand to Sossusvlei, a clay pan with skeleton trees beneath towering pink dunes. Mobs of people wandering about. Signs say don't touch the trees, which would be broken & gone in no time.

Back to camp for lunch. We're staying in Sessiem Camp Site, inside Namib-Naukluft Natl. Park. Pasta, kidney beans, and cabbage salad for lunch. Quite hot.

On the road at 1 pm after a stop at nearby Sossus Oasis for gas and ice cream bars! Boy did they taste good.

Drove gravel roads today. The scenery is stark, varied, and magnificent. Towering pink dunes, folded black rock hills, sweeping acacia-dotted plains, herds of

oryx. Constantly changing colors & textures.

At 2:15 we pulled into Solitaire, with hotel, cafe, bakery, grocery, & gas. We had a flat tire. The mechanics used a cheater bar about 10 feet long to loosen the lug nuts. I tried the "drinking yogurt," which tasted just like others I've had. A cute calico cat snoozed contentedly on the rock wall in the bakery cafe. Mongoose out back.

The oasis was mobbed with Europeans, many with small children. It's holiday month in Europe...

British word of the day: bore or bore hole = well.

On the road again at 3:15. The bumpy road is very noisy. Hard to talk, music with earplugs works well.

Arrived at "Bush^{man} Camp" at 4 pm. Had the place to ourselves for a short while until the G Adventures bus pulled in, disgorging about 14 energetic young people.

It's a nice place, with a shady bar patio, small pool, cement cooking shelters, solar showers, and a small watering hole that draws critters in the evening. The owner says you can sleep with no tent as there are no critters that bite or sting. I heard a "splat." It was a lizard

that had dropped from the roof onto the patio.

Martin says the reason there is no water conservation here is because there is a robust aquifer that is replenished by the Atlantic ocean.

Dinner was an incredible carrot-ginger soup, rice, veggies, meat stew. Stars galore.

We have a duty roster & rotate each day between cooking help, dishes, & cleaning the truck (sweep & mop). Grant & I are on team A with Kathy & Rosemary. Alex calls Grant & me "team America."

After dark we went down to the patio to look for critters at the watering hole. A very timid springbok appeared briefly and then we waited for about half an hour, no one talking, looking at stars. Then shapes appeared, resolving like the magical deer in Harry Potter, into 8 zebra! They spent about 20 minutes cautiously taking turns filling up with water before fading into the darkness.

Saturday Aug. 24

The morning air was delightfully soft & cool. The desert enchants in the morning with soft light.

The campground owners have two small children. There can't be a school anywhere

near here, so will they be homeschooled?
Will they have playmates?

I tried We-Bix for breakfast. Like shredded wheat but mushier. They break down quickly in milk. Nice to try but not my thing.

Alex says Intrepid is an Australian company. Martin says all tours include Australians.

On the road at 8:15. Stopped for group pictures at the Tropic of Capricorn, a sign covered in stickers everywhere except the letters, in a flat expanse of featureless desert.

Saw a group of zebras, including an "albino" one that was mostly solid black.

The air is so dry my hands hurt and my cubicles are splitting, despite constant hand lotion.

We drove through a very scenic stretch of mountains, with rocky canyons and convoluted rock formations. Stopped to climb a small hill to see ~~a~~ a panoramic view of uplifted, tilted shale outcroppings dotted with chunks of quartz, and flecked with mica. Saw two baboons & a baby briefly as we sailed by a stand of trees in a canyon bottom. Saw a kestrel on a fence post, and some short columnar cactus.

Many uses for a bandana: dust mask, sweat rag, wash cloth, evaporative cooling cloth (when wet), keep hair out of face, clean eye glasses... Glad we each brought one.

We left the mountains and drove the next hour or so across a flat, grey, sandy plain with few shrubs, but, surprisingly, ostrich and oryx. The dirt road had occasional patches of rough washboard that rattled our kidneys and shook loose window hardware, causing windows to drop open.

The window mechanisms are not well made. The speed limit was 100 km/hr, or about 60 mph.

We ~~saw~~ ^{see} many ^{rental} trucks with roof tents.

Just before Walvis Bay we got back on a paved road. At 12:30 we pulled into the Dunes mall for lunch. I never expected to see a huge indoor shopping mall in Namibia! We could have been anywhere in the world. We got baguettes at a grocery store and Grant bought a \$20 belt at Woolworths. Then we used the free wifi until it was back to the truck at 1:30. It was nice to get email after three or four days without.

We paid with cash at the grocery and I carefully tucked the change into my fanny pack and zipped the compartment. It was about \$10. As we walked down the mall a white woman tapped me on the shoulder and handed me the money! I can't even fathom how it could have fallen

out. She said, "You are so lucky we saw the money and not someone else."

The mall was very noisy and commercial, and I couldn't get over how western it felt. Africa has apparently changed a lot in the 30 years since I was in West Africa.

We drove to the nearby beach to see hundreds of lesser and greater flamingos right next to the shore! There was a paved waterfront trail and many fancy beach homes.

After getting weighed at a station we continued up the coast about 30 min. to the town of Swakopmund. It was thrilling to see the ocean waves and smell the salt air after a week in the desert. The beaches looked beautiful. Apparently the water is too cold & rough for swimming.

We all went to an adventure tour company where they told us about each option. Grant had hoped to go sea fishing, but it turned out to be four hours in a small boat with no sun shade, and he was worried he'd be fried to a crisp. Normally it's cool & foggy here, but today was unusually hot.

I signed up for a township tour that costs about \$35.

We're staying at Municipal Bungalows, a tidy compound of palm trees, cabins, and chalets on the edge of downtown, just a block from the beach. Each bungalow has two bedrooms, bath, & kitchen with hot plate & fridge. We have one room and Klaus has the other. Our room has two small beds and two small shelves.

We left our towels in the bathroom and Klaus used them, thinking they had been provided with the room! That was a bit awkward, and not his fault.

I walked to the nearby laundry and was shocked that it cost almost \$10 for 4 shirts, 1 pair of pants, and a few socks and underwear.

Then I walked to the grocery store for some breakfast items and bottled water - Martin says don't drink the tap water here. The sea breeze in town felt so refreshing, and the air isn't so dry. We can hear the ocean from our bungalow.

We went to dinner with Deb, Rosemary, Leah, Judith, and Alex. We tried a few places that were full or too fancy before going to Neapolitano, which Martin had recommended.

I had a bowl of butternut squash soup with buttered toast. It was delicious, and plenty of food. Grant had weiner schmitzel and potato and liked it. Total was about \$10 + tip.

Back to the bungalow for a nice shower. Windows open for some cool air. No screens and no bugs. Wifi at the bungalows is pricey.

The restaurant had wifi but it wasn't working, which was frustrating.

Namibian dollars and South African rand are interchangeable. They are each worth about 7 cents. So a \$7 meal costs 100 Namibian dollars. It's strange to hear that a meal costs "100 dollars."

Swakopmund was a German town in the late 1800s and has beautiful old German architecture as well as German restaurants, bakeries, and beer. Many German tourists come here.

Sunday Aug. 25

A lazy morning in the bungalow getting caught up on photos, enjoying my first yogurt in a week, and having a leisurely cup of coffee.

Then to the Pick-n-Pay grocery for lunch supplies, and to the laundry to pick up our clean clothes. Many things are closed on Sundays but the coffee roaster next store was suffusing the air with that acid but enticing smell.

Delicious lunch of ham, swiss, mayo, mustard on good German bread.

There appears to be a thriving black middle class in Namibia, judging from the many people we

saw shopping at the mall in Walvis Bay, and the many we see here in Swakopmund dressed nicely and buying ice creams for their kids.

New word: vendorphins (that euphoric feeling you get patronizing souvenir vendors). We walked down to the ocean and up the flower-and-palm-lined promenade, enjoying the breeze and crashing waves. Then through the vendor market, which had many beautiful wood and stone carvings, plus beaded jewelry and textiles. But we want to wait until later in the trip before buying anything. The vendors were not pushy.

While Grant read in the shade I spent about an hour in the museum, which has a wonderful collection of local human history, plus local natural history and a great exhibit about the San people. Well worth the \$2 US it cost!

We ran into Kathy, Josh, and Judith, just back from a sea fishing trip where they caught 15 fish, including a small shark. They were grinning ear to ear.

We spent about two hours at Die Muschel cafe catching up on email and Facebook while enjoying tasty apple crumble.

77° today with a light breeze. Perfect. So grateful they're not having their usual cold weather here.

Back to bungalow for a rest before dinner.

Beth at the local tour company recommended a restaurant called ~~Opal~~ Olupale for Namibian food. The owner was a sweet, round, friendly woman with a huge smile. She brought us the traditional fermented corn beverage (the non-alcoholic version) called oshikundu, to try. Delicious. She recommended the oshingale (black-eyed pea) soup as a starter. We loved it. Then we split an order of spinach stew with thick maize porridge. Incredible flavors. She simmers home-grown spinach with tomato, onion, butter, garlic, and spices. It reminded me of the traditional food in Togo.

The soup was served drizzled with marula oil. It's similar to argan oil in that it's a gourmet oil from a tree nut. It has a subtle nutty flavor.

The total bill was 270 dollars (~\$17) plus tip. Raina, the owner, asked if she could have a picture with us. Altogether a very memorable evening!

Raina often used the expression "100 percent!" instead of absolutely or for sure. Adorable.

Monday Aug 26

Another perfect sunny day, a bit cooler than yesterday.

I signed up for a township tour at 10 am. When no one came I called from the reception desk and they said since I was only one person they were going to cancel, or something to that effect. Some sort of misunderstanding I guess. But they sent someone to get me about 10:30. He was at the barber shop when he got the call!

His name was Franz and he is 22 years old. It was great having a private tour and being able to ask lots of questions. He is Oshivambo and lives in Mandesa township on the outskirts of Swakopmund. Oshivambo are about 50% of Namibia's population. There are 11 ethnic groups.

Mandesa used to be where blacks had to live in government housing during apartheid (during South African rule, after the Germans and before independence in 1990). Now the homes are owned.

Today is Heroes Day, honoring the martyrs of the independence movement.

Franz taught me a few words of Oshivambo & Damara. We stopped at a market to see dried spinach cakes, seal oil, barbecuing cow hearts, and fried dough balls (delicious), called fat cakes.

One section is for uranium miners who earn more money - because their job is dangerous - and have nicer houses.

People pay about 50¢ for diagnosis & treatment at the health clinic.

DRC is Democratic Resettlement Community, land where people are allowed to build temporary houses while they save to get a real house.

The government is building affordable housing that costs \$150-800K Namibian.

We went to a women's cooperative in the DRC where a woman demonstrated the ^{Damara} clicking language and showed me the crafts made by local women and children. There was nothing I wanted to buy but they hope for a small donation for their feeding program. The woman is 34 and has five children.

We also went to a daycare center where the children sang for me. There were only a few children because of the holiday. They were adorable. They also asked for a donation... ^{they sang songs:} ABC & math

Our last stop was a restaurant where they served black-eyed peas, pap, spinach stew, and mopane worms. I didn't try the worms, having heard what they taste like.

Franz is in an acapella group of seven, but only four were

able to attend. They were incredibly talented with beautiful voices!

Meanwhile an East Indian soap opera was playing on the television. A bit surreal!

The arts cooperative walls were built of sand-filled plastic bottles. Fireproof and "temporary," as required in the DRC.

She explained how they clean ostrich eggs: shake them to liquify the contents and separate them from the shell, drill a hole, pour out the liquified contents (and eat), then wash out & dry.

I gave Franz & the school each a Seattle postcard. Back to bungalow about 1:30.

Chilly wind and 64°. Wifi at Die Muschel. Mediocre dinner at the Brauhaus with the gang. Grant had a giant pig knuckle and I had a smoked meat soup that turned out to be spicy. The place was packed, Teutonic, and noisy. (Teutonic decor & patrons.)

Swakopmund center is very European, and prices reflect that.

Tues Aug 27

A cold, overcast morning, so we get to see typical Swakopmund weather after all.

On the road at 9:15 after crepes for breakfast (I also finished off my yogurt, with granola).

The ~~the~~ truck didn't get washed because John got called away to help another truck that broke down. So the windows are quite dirty for picture taking.

Paved road north along the coast. Bleach, muted colors of tan sand, white-blue sea, and grey-white sky. Tracks labeled "mile x" led to surfcasting spots; pickup trucks bristling with front-mounted poles like antennae.

Crashing waves. The ghostly skeleton of the Dunedin (sp?) Star, wrecked in the mid-1800s. (This is called the Skeleton Coast, at least partly because there are many wrecked ships.)

The road is narrow, with no shoulder, like Baja. Bleak and barren landscape. Sand & salt quarries. A truck laden with white salt. A sign saying "Lichen field, vehicles prohibited."

Arrived at Cape Cross seal colony at 11:00. Thousands of seals covered the ground, the rocks, the beach, and bobbed in the waves. Smelly but not that bad. We could get right up next to them. Pups nursing, seals brawling, braying, yawning, piled on top of each other,

climbing over each other. Pups crying for mom, looking for mom, zipping around on their bent flippers. Two jackals prowled around, looking for sick or dying. I saw two emaciated pups trying to sneak onto teats and being chased away.

Thousands of cape cormorants streaming along the shore in a long line.

Lunch a short way down the road (salad, tuna, cheese, bread). Large pink rock salt crystals for sale. A trac trac chat hoping for crumbs. on the honor system.

On the road again at 1:20. Retraced our steps south to Henties Bay then turned east onto a dirt road. Sign said Dorob National Park.

More about our group. Leah is youngest at 26. Klaus is oldest at 75. Alex is 36, Judith is about 46, Rosemary is 59, Deb is in her 50s. Josh + Kathy I'm guessing are in their 30s.

We arrived at Spitzkoppe about 3:30 after watching the rocky granite shapes rise up from the plain for half an hour or so. A goat herder wandered by, seemingly miles from anywhere. The road got very bumpy.

It's gorgeous here. Red granite shapes reminiscent of Joshua Tree. Went for a long walk, saw ⁴⁰⁰⁰⁻_{year-}^{old} San rock paintings, more rock hyrax sunning themselves (and somehow

clinging to the steep rock face).

Saw black and white pririt batis birds. Heard lizards chattering.

Dinner was shepherd's pie (meat, mashed potatoes, cheese) and veggies. Delicious. Sat around a fire and talked about what to expect in ~~Etosha~~ ^{Etosha} Park tomorrow. We're all excited. Chilly here. Dense stars.

The San used animal blood, wine, ochre, and euphorbia milk for their paintings.

Wed Aug 28

Awoken at 5 by what sounded like a radio blasting sports announcements. Martin says it was a church.

Eggs for breakfast (I had granola). Gorgeous morning with an orange crescent moon and glowing red sunrise on the rocks. It is magical here. Cool, pleasant.

On the road at 7. Back to the paved Usakos Road. Sign proclaimed it "The Arid Eden Route."

There's a fine coating of dust on everything.

Today was amazing. Driving to Etosha we saw red-billed hornbills, hundreds of

red earth termite nests, looking like Sussian stalactites or gnarled troll fingers. Knobs of misshapen earth up to 6 feet tall.

The roads in Namibia are well-signed and in good condition. There are regularly-spaced roadside picnic tables.

Yesterday we asked Martin about polygamy in Kenya. He said a new law requires the consent of the first wife before taking another wife. The government hopes this will address the problem of fatherless children from men having multiple families.

To work for Intrepid, drivers must also be mechanics, cooks must have food handler's training, and guides must have a degree plus first aid training.

Other random notes: Kids know many of the same songs worldwide it seems, such as "If you're happy & you know it" and the ABC song. I had so much fun singing them with kids yesterday.

There are ATMs everywhere, and credit cards are accepted in most places.

We arrived in the very pleasant town of Omaruru about 9 am. 35¢ to use the grocery store toilet. Grabbed a few groceries. Prosperous little place. Perfect weather.

On the road again at 9:30. Saw giraffe and zebras. Workers removing brush along the road - fire prevention?

~~At 2:00~~ We got back on a dirt road. Stopped for gas. Getting hot. Lunch will be in Outjo.

late so we had snacks to tide us over. Saw a warthog, trees covered in cottony white seed clusters. Back onto pavement — just before Outjo.

Another aside: I was dismayed to see the presumably poor Damara woman in the Township using disposable diapers...

Gas stations are very nice, nicer than many US small towns.

Saw goats, horses, windmills, charcoal kilns smoking.

Christianity has pretty thoroughly infiltrated this part of Africa. Lots of churches, including Lutheran (white people only?) and Roman Catholic.

Arrived at Okuakueyo camp in Etosha National Park about 2 pm. It's very hot. After setting up tents and a late lunch, Martin showed us the water hole for viewing animals tonight, and then we went on a game drive in the truck. It is a dry gravelly dusty plain with very few trees. There are man-made water holes to keep the animals alive because this area now gets so little rain. We saw a lot of elephant scat, like super-size horse poop.

We saw a lot of giraffes bending down to eat mopane leaves. The mopane bushes are covered in yellow fruits, but apparently the animals don't eat those. We saw hundreds of springbok. Crowned

and blacksmith lapwings. And then a great thrill: a rare black rhino at a water hole! Martin said we were very lucky to see it. But then a second one arrived! They huffed and puffed at each other but didn't fight.

We finally tore ourselves away and then saw a bull elephant. At the next watering hole we watched giraffe and springbok back away as a male lion arrived! He drank his fill slowly before sauntering off. Wow. It was hot on the truck and we were tired but euphoric. Also saw a goshawk and Kori bustards (largest flying bird).

Back at camp we inhaled fried chicken, rice, and veggies. Dishes, cold shower, then off to the water hole where we saw SEVEN black rhino (including two babies), three giraffe (they splay their front legs comically when they drink), and three elephants. Two of them mated after drinking water together (the female offered the male water from her trunk - apparently a sign that she's interested?). Lots of bats flying around. What a day! We're exhausted and had to call it a day.

Saw jackals running around the tents. If you leave leather shoes out they will carry them away and chew on them.

Another elephant comment. As the pair walked away from the water hole, en route to their tryst, he held onto her tail and nudged her along with his trunk.

As the bull elephant arrived at the water hole he gave his ears a mighty flap. The loud "whack" and cloud of dust caused all the other animals to take a few scurrying steps back.

It was interesting talking to Rosemary about her work in health care with Australian aboriginal people.

Although we saw many rhino today, Martin says their numbers are still declining due to poaching. Their long gestation (15 months?) works to their disadvantage.

Thurs Aug 29

Up at 5 am to a lovely cool morning. Crepes for breakfast. On the road at 7:45.

I love that this tour is cramming so much into 7 weeks, but it does mean there isn't much down time, for pools, journaling, showering, organizing stuff, or just relaxing.

There are many people here with children. What an amazing experience that must be!

Saw a large weaver bird nest on the ground. It must have gotten too heavy and broken the branch.

So far there have been no mosquitoes or other bugs!

Some antelope, such as springbok, overpopulate and must be culled. That is the meat offered on restaurant menus.

The many vehicles in the park stir up a lot dust. Not sure how that affects the plants or air quality.

Today's sightings, as we drove from one side of the park to the other:

Blue wildebeest (they have magnificent mohawks); elusive, tiny, well-camouflaged Damara dik dik; a mother lion with three less-than-one-year-old cubs (so cute wrestling with each other, and one fell in the water - surprised!); black-faced impala with twisty horns like lathe-turned stair spindles; many ^{scarcely} giraffe ambling, running, feeding; black korhaan (sp?) bird; goshawk (pale chattering?); a ^{rare-to-see} honey badger rooting and digging for food (the goshawk stood nearby waiting for worms); springbok pronking; red hartebeest with young; white termite nests, grey heron.

You must stay in your car except at several viewpoints & rest areas.

Lots more "forests" of low trees today, most look like they're barely hanging on and many are dead (interesting how much the tree skeletons look like animals).

The water is potable in the park but tastes minerally.

The Etosha Pan is a vast expanse of former lake bed, coated in mossy green algae left from rains last year I think.

There's supposedly been no rain for a year and yet there's grass.

Nice rest area with large thatch-roofed picnic shelter and tables. Interpretive signs. Young Dutch couple said their rental truck with roof-top tent and all camping gear cost ~~€~~1000 euros a week. Campgrounds are about \$20 us a night and you have to reserve ahead. Gas is about \$4 a gallon. There are also park entrance fees. So they're paying for three weeks about what we're paying for seven.

The termite nests here are white.

Arrived at Namutoni National Wildlife Resort (NWR) at 12:30. ^{East edge of Etosha.} The camp has quite a few trees and nice facilities, including laundry sinks, a pool, store, restaurant, and bungalows. ^{Banded mongoose everywhere.}

After lunch of rice, beans, veggies, and cold fruit salad (cold things taste like heaven in this heat), we had a little down time. We sat by the pool (Grant and I) and dunked our feet in the cool water. Then we had an ice cream bar (cold!) before heading out on a game drive at 3:30. It was hot in the truck even with the windows open! But it's worth it for what we see. At the first watering hole we saw over 100 elephants! They just kept streaming in. There were

little babies and every size up to jumbo males. Martin thinks there were four families. There was some posturing but mostly it was all friendly nuzzling, wrestling, wallowing, dirt baths, suckling. Zebra, giraffe, oryx waited their turn. And waited. And waited.

Many large grey go-away birds in the trees. They have fluffy crests and long tails.

Back to camp at 6 (we had dropped Grant off about 5:15 because he was exhausted). The camp is fenced to keep animals out. There are security guards walking around. Many more people are here now. Banded mongoose are scurrying around digging for food and probably hoping for handouts. It's cooling off as the sun goes down.

We opted to skip the night safari as we need some down time, and it goes from 7-10 pm.

Fried potato wedges, meat stew, veggies for dinner. The meat is too tough for me, but I love the potatoes. Crunchy on the outside but not greasy.

Martin had bought a baseball cap that said "Blink 182: Crappy punk rock," not knowing that crappy was a sort of not nice word, so he didn't want to wear the hat. He gladly gave me permission to remove the label with my knife.

No bugs anywhere yet!

Friday, Aug 30

A soft, cool, lovely morning, the rising sun blazing red from the dust in the air. Cathy & Josh saw hyenas, white rhinos, and sleeping giraffes on their night safari.

French toast for breakfast (I had granola).
On the road at 8:45.

Paved road to Tsumeb, arriving about 10:30. We stocked up on supplies, ate delicious meat pies* and surveyed the gorgeous produce at the outdoor market.

John got our truck tire repaired. The people were very friendly, and the vendors have not been pushy anywhere. Quite warm in the sun. AC in the mall stores.

The security worker at the grocery store asked to see our receipt as we left. I was pleased to not be deferred to because I'm white. White people make up about 6% of Namibia's population. ~~They~~ Lots of Portuguese influence visible in food package labels.

Back on the road at 1:00. We passed many grain fields and ranches with cattle, sheep, goats. Hills appearing. Yucca-like trees with tall flower stalks that resemble coast agave.

As we ate our meat pies at the grocery store deli counter, we chatted with

* ham & cheese for me, chicken & mushroom for me

Paulina, a cute young employee who says she loves her job and the company treats its employees well.

Arrived at Roy's Camp, about 50 km from Grootfontein, about 2:30. They have solar panels, wifi, clever metal art from recycled parts of old cars and farm implements, a pool, a bar, and thatch-roofed sitting areas with fanciful wood furniture. 93° in the shade. Bungalows here cost \$45 a night. Shower rooms here are called "ablutions" (not just at this camp).

Many grey go-away birds, red-billed spurfowl, yellow-billed hornbills. A few flies & ants.

It's Friday night and the campground is filling up with people who look like locals. There is a restaurant that looks nice and serves a single multi-course meal that includes eland.

They feed the bush babies at 6:45 but we missed it. Hopefully tonight. So nice to do wifi, have a cold juice, and soak our feet in the pool.

Butternut squash soup, mashed potatoes, chicken, veggies, and grilled fish (caught by Josh, Cathy, & Judith) for dinner.

nice laundry sinks and clotheslines, so we washed a few things. Saw a damara dik-dik in the dark.

Saturday, Aug. 31

Another lovely African morning. Crimson-breasted shrikes in the trees. Crepes for breakfast (they call them pancakes).

On the road at 8:00, heading south on a dirt road. 75 kilometers to the Ju/'Hoansi Living Museum of San culture. The people were moved from their diamond-rich ancestral lands in the Kalahari desert to this bushveld scrub, which they call Kalahari forest. They are not allowed to hunt, so their culture is being lost. They now live in regular houses in a nearby village, and wear western clothes. The museum allows them to earn income by demonstrating their traditional way of life. For now they still retain their skills of making hide clothing, using fire sticks, finding food & medicinal plants, and hunting with poison-tipped arrows, but it seems like it will be hard to sustain this longterm.

The people look so exotic. The women wear colorful jewelry made from seeds and ostrich shell beads. They are happy to be photographed. They've built traditional grass huts for show.

We went for a long walk through the bush to learn about plants. The root of one smelled like menthol and is used for sore muscles. There was a nice breeze to cool us.

They have a nice composting toilet for visitors. Judging from the infant I saw pooping, human waste is buried

We spent over two hours there.

Our San guide spoke good English 49 and was educated in local schools. in the sand. There is also a campground.

We paid \$3.50 us each to watch several traditional dances, including the elephant dance, in which the women sing while the shaman heals a sick person with smoke. They had a nice crafts area with jewelry and wooden carvings. We bought two necklaces for about \$7 us each.

We were asked for a donation to help fix the road, which is rutted, with deep sand. As a matter of fact we got stuck in the sand driving out. It took over three hours for Martin to walk three miles to the town, find a tractor and fuel, and get back to us. Lucky for us it was a cooler day (88°) with a lovely breeze, so we sat comfortably in the truck doing journal, reading, and watching a Planet Earth episode on my phone (downloaded from Netflix). So perfect that ^{this was an afternoon off, so} it didn't affect our schedule.

We got rescued at 3:15 and fishtailed our way through the sand getting out. It must have been more uphill going out. We all had snacks to tide us over. We got back to camp about 4:45 and fell ravenously upon a late lunch of pasta, hot dog stew, salad, and banana pudding.

Had a fabulous hot shower, did wifi, then watched the bush babies (galagos) come down out of the trees at dusk. They are tiny and adorable, with big eyes, Yoda ears, and long tails. They

There was a "vet^{erinary} disease checkpoint" near the San village. This is a cattle ranching area. I think it's to protect the park animals.

"fly" through the trees, jumping like monkeys.

Another Intrepid group is here, heading south. They have 22^{17?} people!! I am so grateful we do not.

Dinner at 8:00, since lunch was so late. Kenyan food: chapathis, ugali (pap), spinach with onions, mung beans. Delicious!

Sunday, Sept. 1

Up at 6, quite chilly^{wind.} Crepes for breakfast. On the road at 8:30, paved, 199 km to Rundu. The sky is pale again today - dust? Arrived in Rundu at 11:20. IF's on the Angola border and is a popular place to go shopping for clothes, housewares, food, hardware, auto parts, etc. The electricity was down, so there were long lines at the stores. We had hoped to buy lunch at the grocery store, but they weren't even letting people in until the queues cleared. The only other choice was fast food. We ended up having chicken and rice at KFC. It tasted OK but was heavy. Then we headed back to the truck, only to see another grocery store with electricity, no lines, and meat pies! Junk food is sadly very popular here.

1 kilojoule = ~4 calories (food labels here are in kilojoules)

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While we waited by the truck, a woman let me hold her cute chubby, welcome 6-month-old baby. A taxi driver smiled & said "welcome to Namibia!"

Today we passed cows, goats, tidy compounds of thatch huts (walls of sticks filled with mud) and silver or blue tin huts, roadside crafts (pottery, wood carvings), an outdoor church under a tree (table covered in white cloth, men in white robes), a man in a peach-colored suit walking through a field, oranges & firewood for sale, homemade gutters funelling water off a tin roof into a plastic water tank, women & girls carrying heavy loads on their heads, churchgoers dressed in yellow, purple, or orange robes.

The landscape got greener as we neared the river that forms Namibia's northern border. Papaya trees and green trees. (It's winter, so some trees are bare.)

There's little litter in general, but definitely some as you get closer to towns.

People walking long distances along the roads. Few people have sunglasses or hat brims for sun protection. I wonder if cataracts are a problem.

~~I saw a baobab tree!~~ ^{stet} The road is called "The 4 Rivers Route."

Arrived at Rainbow Camp near Bagani, on the Okavango River, at 4:10 pm. It's beautiful and peaceful here! Pool, bar, showers, boat rides available.

Another flaming orange sunset. Chicken, rice, veggies for dinner. Godfrey's 40th birthday was on Aug. 22 (we found out today) so we surprised him with a cake and card.

Very few mosquitoes here. Our clothes are sprayed with permethrin and we have head nets, so we are prepared. We brought Picaridin instead of toxic Deet repellent.

The former is endorsed by the CDC. We are taking Malarone. The other option is Doxycycline, but there were potential side effects we didn't want to deal with.

Saw open-bill storks fishing for snails in the river. Hippos are the #1 killer in Africa because they and humans are trying to share habitat.

Monday Sept. 2

Chilly morning. On the road 8:15. Kids walking to school in uniforms with bright yellow shirts. Women dressed in colorful head scarf, shawl, and wrap.

There's a freezer in the truck for meat, which we eat quite a bit of.

The free condom dispenser at the border was empty. Botswana supposedly has done a good job of reducing and treating HIV.

Checked out of Namibia and into Botswana. Saw vervet monkeys.

It was a short ride to the free ferry across the Okavango River. An elephant-tusk-motif bridge is under construction and slated to open in 2020. A taxi driver was blasting Def Leopard. Vendors sold dried fish, fat cakes, and fried potato wedges.

The road to the delta was really bumpy - bone-jarring, bladder-bashing, tiring, a bit endless, mostly desert scrub with many elephant-damaged trees, with glimpses of green delta grass and trees. This is basically Kalahari desert turned green by seasonal water flow from Angola. Cattle grazing in the delta - I wonder if they cause contamination.

Children wave and call to us. Saw fish eagles and a lilac-breasted roller, sacred ibis, magpie shrike.

Goat and cattle corrals made of sticks and branches. Trees coated in small purple blossoms, men with short-handled hoes over their shoulders, many burned tree stumps. We're told it has something to do with making charcoal. Bougainvillea blooming.

Arrived at last at our launch point at 1 pm. Hundreds of yellow-billed storks. Met our mokoro (canoe) poles and had lunch. Our guide's Tswana name means "Life," so that is what he calls himself. The mokoros used to

be made of wood but are now fiberglass to conserve trees. They sit low in the water and are supposedly quite stable, but our ride felt a bit tippy. The guide stands in the back and poles like a gondolier, using a stick with a forked tip. The water is about four feet deep. We sat on our sleeping pads and I was pretty comfortable. Grant wasn't comfortable and had trouble climbing in and out. But we both loved the serenity and beauty of this place. Our guide called out the names of the birds we saw (I'll list them later).

There was a nice breeze, no mosquitoes, and a few flies. We arrived on the island at 3:30. Life helped us set up our tent. We had to leave enough space between the tents for animals to walk through at night.

The head guide is Motts, a big teddy bear who exudes competence and knowledge. He gave us a safety briefing: no wandering out of sight, check for animals before going out of your tent at night.

The guides dug a hole and put a toilet seat stand over it. That was for "heavy duty" use. For "light duty" we were told to

go anywhere, and cover our toilet paper with sand.

At 5:00 we got back in the mokoros to see the hippos and the sunset. There were at least 20 hippos in the lagoon, surfacing to breathe, yawn, or check us out. They usually only get out of the water at night. We could hear their grunts and exhalations (we saw them up close, but the sound travels quite far).

We also saw two herds of elephants. We got within 100 feet of several (they actually approached us, to drink water). A tiny baby waited hidden in the bushes with its mother.

We were very lucky to see two crocodiles, one slithering into the water and one sunning on the bank.

The sunset over the delta, clouds of birds streaming to their roosts, was unforgettable. Okavango is a magical place, and I'm so glad I got to come here.

We didn't have our pads for this 1.5-hour ride, and the discomfort ~~made~~ distracted somewhat from the experience.

Spaghetti and veggies for dinner, followed by roasted marshmallows over a roaring fire.

The guides are camping here too. After dinner they sang and danced

for us. We had been asked to sing songs for them. We had trouble finding songs we all knew. We did "Home on the Range," the Aussies did a song about a gum tree, Grant and I sang "On the Road Again," and we all did "Eentsie Weentsie Spider" with the hand motions.

Cool outside but warm in the tent all night.

Tuesday Sept. 3

I heard hippos grunting near the tent. Elephants came through but I didn't hear them (they walk quietly). They were grazing nearby in the morning.

internet says there are 130k in all of Botswana

Life told us that elephants wipe out crops, so people have to light fires around their fields around harvest time. Motts says there are 250,000 elephants in the delta. The government is trying to find a way to cull them.

Lions kill cows as well.

Loud noise of bees feeding on flowers in the tree tops.

Up at 6, nature walk at 7:45.

Lovely cool morning with a breeze. We learned that animals like baboons climb termite mounds to get a view, and poop tree seeds, which grow and form islands in the delta. We saw holes dug by armadillos and anteaters, an elephant carcass (skin intact), vervet monkeys, and more hippos. We tasted fallen fruits (fig-like flavor). We got great sightings of a pair of Pel's fishing owls. One of them dropped a catfish tail.

Motts said people had to move out of the delta proper due to tsetse fly, which causes sleeping sickness.

After our walk (which lasted about two hours) we were taken in the mokoros back to the truck. We left our pads and sleeping bags, then climbed back in the mokoros for a 10-minute ride to Umvulu Camp. We're sleeping in big tents with real beds. Grant and I have a queen!

It's very hot here, with an occasional welcome breeze. Hippos grunting in the lagoon near the tents. Rice, beans, cabbage for lunch. They are playing African gospel pop in the common area.

Motts says they banned hunting in Namibia 5 years ago.

So nice to have all afternoon off. We read, showered, journaled, bird watched.

Birds seen in Okovango delta:

African darter
 white-breasted cormorant
 Reed cormorant
 Pelican (pink-backed)
 White-faced whistling duck
 Grey heron Purple heron
 Squacco heron African spoonbill
 Great egret red-knobbed coot
 Cattle egret black crane
 Black heron spur-winged goose
 African openbill
 yellow-billed stork marabou stork
 Sacred ibis vultures
 Hadeda ibis
 African jacana
 Blacksmith lapwing
 African fish eagle yellow-billed kite
 Pel's fishing owl
 Black-collared barbet
 Grey go-away bird white-crowned shrike
 Pied Kingfisher hammerkop
 woodpecker crested barbet
 Carmine bee-eater gray hornbill
~~Scrub wood-hoopoe~~
 coucal (Senegal)
 White-browed robin-chat ~~Scrub wood-hoopoe~~
 Red-billed oxpecker
 Wattled starling
 blue starling (blue-eared?)
 dark-capped bulbul

We passed on the optional nature walk. Saw some great birds, and hippos yawning and grunting at sunset.

BBQ chicken, fried potatoes, and veggies for dinner. Delightful to hear hippos grunting in the dark.

Lots of flies - because of the cows? (There's dung everywhere.)

Wed. Sept. 4

Awake at 5, listening to hippos grunting and bellowing in the dark. Up at 6. Another magical morning. Dozens of bird calls sound like the jungle. The hippos sound like a tuba orchestra warming up.

We had crepes for breakfast, then climbed into the mokoros for the short ride back to the truck. There were thank you speeches, a tip envelope, a song, and photos. Grant and I tipped the recommended \$20 us each.

On the road at 8:30. The 2⁺-hour bumpy road wasn't as bad as two days ago, perhaps because it was morning, and cooler.

The grass used for huts and fencing is papyrus. Saw a solar panel on the thatch roof of a hut. Cooking fires

perfuming the air. Cell towers (service is available even in the remotest areas).

Arrived at the ferry at 10:36. This time there was a line. We boarded at noon and got back to camp about 1:45 (we crossed the border back into Namibia).

I opted for a pb + j sandwich for lunch. 91°. The whole afternoon free to do wifi, journal, and relax.

Thurs, Sept 5

Up at 5, breakfast at 6:30 (crepes). 61°. On the road at 7. Paved road today. Saw a gorgeous sable antelope. Stopped for fuel, road construction, and a checkpoint. The officer came in the truck and saw that 9 of us weren't wearing seatbelts. He said it was \$1000 NO fine each (\$70 US). We were mortified. We hadn't been wearing them because they're uncomfortable and hard to use. I opened my big mouth to explain why we (or I) wasn't wearing mine, and realized I just sounded critical and defensive. Martin got mad at me. I think the others did too. I can be too outspoken and I need to try

to keep my mouth shut sometimes.

I apologized to Martin and a few others later, which made me feel marginally better.

Today we saw two cheetahs next to the road! At first they looked like huge monkeys, with their long legs and long tails.

Also many of the purple blossom trees and huge baobabs at the border crossing! The fabled Caprivi Strip did not look lush from the road. When we crossed the border we could see it was like a green pasture along an arm of the Chobe River, thick with wild and domestic grazing animals.

Many burned fields. Seventh Day Adventist and Full Gospel churches.

School kids in yellow, purple, blue shirts. People working hard in the hot sun.

Arrived in Katima Mulilo at 12:25. Meat pies for lunch at the Pick n Pay (steak and onion - yum). On the road again at 1:30. South to the Ngoma border crossing. We had to dip the soles of our shoes in something that kills hoof and mouth disease.

Wonder how people in remote villages charge their cell phones...

~~The~~ Chobe National Park with its abundance of grass and healthy trees, was a nice contrast to the miles of

denuded earth and axe-scarred trees outside the park.

Arrived at Chobe River Lodge about 4:15. It's gorgeous! A fancy safari resort right on the Chobe River, with wifi, pool, and all amenities. We're staying in the adjacent campground and our site is right on the river. There are vervet monkeys, baboons, and warthogs wandering around (looking for food to steal).

Dinner was rice, chicken, veggies. Godfrey told a hilarious story about punching a baboon that was stealing a loaf of bread, and getting punched back!

Deb wrote a version of wheels on the Bus that we sang to the crew (the cook on the truck says "hand wash, hand wash, hand wash"; the driver on the truck says "truck, truck, truck"; the guide on the truck says "jambo, jambo, Alex") and they loved it. No mosquitoes! Lovely warm evening, quarter moon.

This is a noisy, busy place after our many days of mostly having the bush to ourselves. This would make an amazing, though expensive, place to vacation. Prices are easily equivalent to a US resort.

Friday Sept 6

Up at 4:45, game drive at 6, at first light. 10-person open jalopy. Our guide is X, a big friendly man who's been doing this for 24 years. We headed down a very rough and sandy road. Right away we saw a pride of lions feeding on a baby elephant. Vultures waited their turn. Gorgeous backdrop of the Chobe River. Hundreds of marabou storks. Also saw spoonbills, a little bee eater, lilac-breasted roller, little egret, crested and red-necked francolins, giraffes, kudu, kori bustards, marsh harrier, cape buffalo (from a distance), and hippos out of the water. Elephants too.

The trip lasted three hours, and halfway we stopped for tea and rusks (a crunchy biscuit like a cross between a scone and a biscotti). On the way back we passed a very smelly elephant carcass, and the very full lions sleeping in the sun.

X says that August is the busiest month. There were about six jalopies jostling for position today, so I can't imagine August.

It was windy on the way back. Showered (first hot shower in a while - aah). There's a covered veranda next to camp, overlooking the river. What a view!

The people we've met everywhere in Botswana have been very friendly.

"Brunch" at 11. I had a crepe with peanut butter. At least 15 banded mongoose marauding through camp while we ate.

Hung out in the lodge common area for a while. 91° at 1 pm. The truck left to go shopping. Grant had left his ~~his~~ test kit and binoculars on the truck, so we decided to walk to the nearby commercial center to find it. We headed out what we thought was the road, and just then the truck returned. John said we had been heading out into the park and might have run into animals (there were guards who didn't say anything when they watched us walking out). He also said we got lucky because he came back earlier than planned.

At 3 pm we climbed onto a river ~~boat~~ boat for a 3-hour cruise. There were about 25 people on the open-sided boat. A nice breeze kept it very pleasant. The river is beautiful, with grassy islands. It feels like an estuary.

For birds, we saw goliath herons, water thick-knees, neon-orange-billed African skimmers, and a strikingly beautiful collared pratincol. ^{a white-crowned} ~~laping~~ ^{laping} too!

We also saw cape buffalo; baboons; puku, lechwe, and waterbuck; crocs from foot-long babies to 6-meter monsters; elephants taking mud baths

with a brand-new baby; baboons; hippos grazing, a pile of 9 or more hippos sleeping on shore, and two hippos that exploded out of the river, one chasing the other! The boat got incredibly close to everything. After ogling the sunset we returned at 6, exhilarated and exhausted. Another incredible day. Saw people in colorful clothing carrying bundles of papyrus. The grass along the river turned gold in the setting sun, and the hills above the river glowed red.

This was the last dinner of this leg of the trip. Deb, Rosemary, Judith, and Klaus will leave when we get to Victoria Falls. Godfrey made leek-onion-ginger soup, mashed potatoes, spinach, and steak.

There were speeches of thanks and goodbye.

Nice breeze, perfect temp, no bugs.

Saturday, Sept. 7

Bushbucks and warthogs hanging around camp this morning. There are a lot of warthogs in this area. It's cute how they kneel on their front legs to feed (because their necks are too short to reach the ground).

Chicken sausage and french toast and papaya for breakfast (I had granola). On the road at 8 am.

It was a short drive to the ^{Zimbabwe} border. Martin warned us that it could take up to two hours to cross, due to long lines, but we were through in about 30 minutes. We paid \$50 each for a multiple entry visa. The officer was pleasant & friendly.

We left the border at 9:30 and arrived in Victoria Falls at 11. We stopped at an activity center to learn about options. There are many "adrenalin" adventures available (bungee jumping, rafting, helicopter rides, etc.) but no one in our group seems to be into that. Most of the group is going on a dinner boat cruise, but it's too pricey (\$68 each) and too much food for us.

Grant and I were interested in a "home-based meal" where you eat local food in a local home, but there were no openings. I did sign up for a one hour massage for \$30.

We arrived at our campground (Victoria Falls rest camp) about 11:30.

Rice, beans, sauteed zucchini, and fruit for lunch.

There are puffy clouds today, the first we've seen since Cape Town I think. It's toasty in the sun but delightfully breezy and pleasant in the shade. There are baobab trees here, and ~~the~~ trees covered in bright yellow flowers. The campground is quiet and leafy. There are several other overland groups here. There are also regular rooms available. There's a pool and a restaurant with comfortable couches. Prices are a bit high everywhere in town - it's a touristy place. We had two Coke lights and a glass of juice and it was \$7.

Zimbabwe is experiencing a currency crisis. Their currency has devalued and is not usable outside the country. The preferred currency is US dollars. All of the prices we've seen are in US dollars.

After lunch we walked to the craft market. The power is out everywhere (apparently this is the norm now to have power only part of the day), so there are many generators running. We were mobbed by people selling worthless Zimbabwe currency notes (old currency?) as souvenirs, others selling carvings and trinkets. Unemployment is said to be about 90%, so people seem pretty desperate.

We were watchful for pickpockets and did not respond to the many attempts to engage us in conversation. We soon escaped back to the campground for peace and quiet.

We have data and text here with our T-mobile plan, but the power outage seems to be affecting the signal. There is also no wifi when the power is out.

The power and wifi came back on at 5. We had dinner at the campground restaurant (In-da-belly, which is the pronunciation of the word Ndebele, an African tribe).

I had pumpkin and sweet potato soup with bread and real butter, and Grant had beef stew, maize porridge, and spinach. The food was good, not great.

#13 + #2 tip. Smoky air due to patio bbq.

Former Ugandan dictator Robert Mugabe, credited with driving the country's economy to ruin, died yesterday at age 95.

He also did some good things, or tried to, but some say his attempts to reduce poverty and inequality were disastrous.

Flags are flying at half mast.

Breezy evening, a little chilly. I bundled up and sat by the pool to read. A group of singers in tribal attire (faux or real zebra skin) arrived to dance and sing at the restaurant. I enjoyed listening to the singing.

Fell asleep hearing the river and the train horn (the tracks run near the camp).

The camp is right in town, easy walking distance to everything. ~~# took about 15~~

US dollars are now the standard currency in Zimbabwe, but there are only bills, no coins. Thus \$1 is the lowest price for anything, and all prices are in \$1 increments. Prices are generally about the same as we'd pay in the states, and many things are quite a bit higher.

Grant helped Godfrey protect the pots and pans from baboons, who wanted to steal them!

Sunday, Sept. 8

Woke at 6 to the happy sound of Godfrey rustling pots and pans in the kitchen. Lovely cool morning, not a cloud in the sky, breezy.

After a yummy breakfast of crepes and peanut butter, we headed out to see the falls about 8:30. Fewer hawkers early in the day. It took maybe 15 minutes to walk to the entrance. A single entrance fee is \$30. The falls are a national park. Inside the gate it's beautiful, with nice trails through lovely forest, part of which is rain forest, due to the spray from the falls. This is lower water season, but still there were a couple of places where the mist

was as heavy as a light rain.

There are 16 viewpoints, all gorgeous. It really is stunningly beautiful. We watched adrenalin-lovers wade out to Devil's Pool right on the edge of the falls. Looks terrifying to me!

It felt great to go for a real walk. It got more crowded later in the morning, but was still less crowded than many US national parks. Happy to see many black people.

Sat on a comfy bench to eat our leftover pb crepes from breakfast. Peaceful and quiet. We're at 3000' elevation, which must be why it's cooler.

Said goodbye to the falls and walked to the Victoria Falls Hotel, a colonial gem with a gorgeous period interior and a view of the Zambezi River and the bridge between Zimbabwe and Zambia.

Back at camp we hung out in the comfy chairs at In da-belly. 73° at 2:30.

The radio music we hear is pop in English, hip hop/light rap, reggae. Not a lot of traditional African music.

I love hearing English as spoken by Africans. Their lilting accent I find absolutely charming. We hear so many accents each day from people of all nationalities speaking English. It must be a challenge for our guides, who

are not native English speakers, to understand them all.

Our tents, pads, and truck were all cleaned today, since this is a changeover point to a new leg of the trip. At 4 pm we met our new travelers: Angie from Germany (60s), Donna from UK (40s), and John from UK (~~40s~~⁶⁷). They all seem nice. Angie and Donna joined Leah, Alex, Grant, and me for dinner at Mama Africa restaurant. It has an African village feel, with picnic tables and candles. I had carrot soup and garlic bread, which came with cheese on top and a salad I was too nervous and full to eat. The soup was fine, but I wouldn't recommend it. Grant had beef stew, spinach, and maize porridge. Total with tip was \$32, about what we pay for a restaurant meal at home, but less than most places in Vic Falls.

A 4-piece band played pleasant, jazzy versions of tunes like Summertime, The Lion Sleeps Tonight, and Bob Marley.

Donna says that Livingstone, across the river in Zambia, is a real town and more enjoyable than Vic Falls, which only exists for tourists.

Walking back from dinner, a young hawker attached himself to our group, desperate for money to buy food. He offered us two of the ubiquitous painted

wooden "canoe" bowls for \$10, then \$5, then \$1. He told us his name was Stephen/Steven and he just needed money to buy some bread. It broke my heart, but I knew that giving him money would just encourage begging, and that there are hundreds of hungry people in this town just like him and I can't help them all. The best thing I can do is to give money to organizations that are helping.

Grant wore shorts and got eaten up by mosquitoes. He didn't know I had repellent with me...

I got frustrated because Grant kept engaging with Steven instead of ignoring him, and I could hear Grant getting more and more frustrated.

Sept 9 Monday

Leave at 8:30 to visit the Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust center, about 15 min. south of town. This is one of the organizations that the Intrepid Foundation supports. VFWT is a conservation organization. A knowledgeable young woman first told us about how they manage human-wildlife conflict, especially crop loss. They fill ping pong balls with chili oil and use a home-made PVC air(?) gun. They also hang chili oil strings around gardens. They buy the chili plants from locals, helping them benefit.

They also teach schoolkids about the benefits of conservation, & about tourism job opportunities. Eco clubs work on conservation activities.

There is no compensation for crop or livestock loss due to wildlife, so it can take a real toll on communities.

Tourism is the biggest employer in this area, and they want kids to see the job benefits of conservation.

They also do disease surveillance to prevent the spread of anthrax and foot & mouth and rabies. They provide free rabies and distemper shots for local dogs. They do lab forensics to prove confiscated meat is poached game so the courts can prosecute.

Since a policy allowing rangers to shoot to kill poachers with guns, poachers

have been using cyanide to lace meat(?) or waterholes, resulting in enormous collateral damage and death to other animals. The target is elephants but they also want to kill the vultures that gather and alert rangers. Recently over 500 vultures were killed in Botswana! Vultures help stop the spread of disease by cleaning up carcasses.

VFWT is also training rangers to test for cyanide poisoning, + collect samples. And they try to nurse injured animals back to health and release them. We met Judge, a female vulture who likes to untie shoelaces, and an orphaned baby bushbuck who will be released in a few months.

Aside: The doorman at Victoria Falls Hotel yesterday saw Grant's pocket knife and told him to hide it or he could be arrested for carrying a weapon.

We got back to camp about 10:00 and walked over to grocery store. Granola was \$42.99! Then we realized it was Zimbabwe dollars, and the actual cost was about \$4 US.

We had leftover French toast with peanut butter for lunch. Baboons were ransacking the garbage cans in the campground. Females in estrus sport enormous red tumor-like swellings on their butts.

At 12:30 I had a one-hour massage for \$30. It was excellent! Janet, a sweet Ndebele woman, has a thatch hut at a nearby hostel.

I showered and we headed over to high tea at the Victoria Falls Hotel. For \$15 each you get tea or coffee, and a 3-tiered tray with scones/cream/jam, four kinds of little sandwiches, and four kinds of sweets, including the best macaroons I've ever had, and ambrosial chocolate decadence. It was a lot of food. And all this while sitting on the terrace of a beautiful historic hotel with a view of huge old trees and the bridge over the Zambezi river. Afterward we strolled the lush grounds. Shona stone sculptures on display, an opulent pool, a luxury restaurant with fountain, baboons bounding about, and luscious floral smells.

Inside the hotel we found a Moorish courtyard and many historic photos, including the royal family's visit in 1947.

Back at camp, we ensconced ourselves in the comfy chairs at In-da-belly and visited with our tour mates. (John is sick and they're keeping him under observation at the hospital.) 77 degrees at 5:30. They are playing house music and pop, and sports TV with no sound. Feels like we could be anywhere in the world.

Freight train horns in the night.
Janet told me that yesterday was a holiday: Hero's Day.

I asked Janet if women get sore necks from carrying heavy loads on their heads and she said yes.

More about VFWT: if they need to know the species of poached meat, they send samples to Germany.

Tues Sept 10

Up at 5. No moon or lights (no power) so it was pitch black. Light by 6. Grant went alarmingly low in the night (36) and woke up crabby at a reading of 350.

Our new member, John, is in the hospital, too sick to join us.

On the way out of town we passed the international airport. ~~It's~~

~~It's~~ Since you can fly direct to Vic Falls, there are many tourists, including older folks.

There is a bathtub in the restroom. I guess there's not a water shortage here.

Donna said the Zambia side of the falls is called "Vic walls" because it's so dry now. The decision about which side of the falls to visit is called "Zim or Zam?"

Both have pros & cons.

I've started using my phone to take notes, instead of a small notepad, and it's working well.

Up at 5, crepes at 6:30, on the road at 7:15. Grant lost his pee bucket..
~~we bought~~

A long drive to Bulawayo. We stopped for a roadside picnic about 12:30, after taking two bush toilet breaks before that. Salad and tuna for lunch.

The trees, bare in winter, have beautiful branching structure, like sculptures. It's uncanny how much the plants can look like animals and vice versa.

Saw a coal plant and coal mine. Oleander fences. Vegetable gardens. Dozens of massive baobab trees, some painted with white numbers. Food and Income Security program signs. Rocky hills with dense scrub and many trees (we were skirting Hwange Natl. Park). Thatch and mud huts with nearby cell towers and power lines. Raised ~~granary~~ platforms, ^{for animal feed} grass.

Rough paved road part of the way and a short construction detour onto dirt.

In Lupane, passed a big state university.

The forest got greener as we went. People holding up gorgeous bunches of carrots for sale. Part of the road is

tolled.

Arrived in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second largest city (around 700k) at 3 pm. Started to walk to the Natural History Museum but decided to shop for cold beverages and a snack instead. Found bran muffins at the Pick 'n Pay and sat on a bench in the park next to city hall. The woman next to me had a cute 3-month-old baby girl and I chatted with the woman just a little.

There were some crafts for sale along the main street, but it wasn't fun to look since the vendors were a bit too in our face. We didn't see any other white people.

It's a nice town, very real, not touristy. There are some attractive colonial buildings, art deco street lights, and flowering street trees. Lots of school kids walking around in their uniforms.

Back at the truck we learned that the museum was closed due to a power outage.

We arrived at Burke's Paradise campground, about 10 minutes from town, about 5 pm. It's quiet and green here. A rhino guide told us about tomorrow's optional activity, which

is a 10-hour outing to Matobo Natl. Park to see rhinos, Bushman rock art, etc. We aren't opting to go because of the long day, the cost (\$100 each), and the intensity of the guide. We heard from other Intrepid folks who went that it was exhausting listening to him talk all day. I'd had plenty after 5 minutes. Chicken, rice, veggies for dinner. No mosquitoes (the Aussies call them mozzies).

An actual room here costs \$19 a night for a double.

John from England was discharged from the hospital and took a bus to Bulawayo and a taxi to the campground. He said the hospital was top-notch and the staff were competent & caring (and the food was amazing).

Wed Sept. 11

Chilly night, 55° this morning. I walked up to the reception area to ask if there was a way to get to Matopo National Park on our own. I ran into an older Australian couple who said they were going and we'd be welcome to join them! What luck.

Martin wasn't thrilled about us going off on our own for some reason (we've done it on other days off) and asked us to "sign out"

of the tour, which we were quite happy to do.

Margie (pronounced with a hard g) and Peter are perhaps 10 years older than us. They've been here before and rented a Toyota ^{4-seater} pickup to drive around Zimbabwe and Zambia. Yesterday their tires were slashed, and when they stopped at a tire store for repairs, someone grabbed Margie's purse out of the car, with her phone and credit card. In the panic and fluster of trying to quickly cancel her card, he inadvertently canceled his! So they may have to cut their trip short due to lack of funds (and shortage of diesel in Zimbabwe). They are from Melbourne.

We left about 9:00 and it's about 35 km to the park. We paid the \$70 entrance fee (\$15 each plus \$10 for the vehicle) as our thanks for them driving us. The entrance staff were incredibly gently-spoken and welcoming.

The park is gorgeous, with weathered granite domes and boulders perched in improbable piles, interspersed with gnarled trees.

First we stopped at White Rhino Cave trail and walked 5 or 10 minutes