

## Summary of Vacation to South Africa, Swaziland, Zimbabwe & Botswana

February 26 – March 17, 2014

I would like to begin by saying this was one of the best vacation trips Donna & I ever had. Seeing the animals in their native environment and observing their movement and habitat was an experience of a lifetime. In addition we were able to learn “first hand” about the “legend” of South Africa – Nelson Mandela and his Long Walk to Freedom. He was truly a remarkable man.

Our adventure began on Wednesday, February 26 when we flew from El Paso to New York City’s JFK airport. We had two minor layover’s along the way, Houston and Washington DC and arrived at JFK shortly before midnight. We stayed overnight at the Comfort Inn near the airport.

On Thursday morning we flew from JFK to Johannesburg, South Africa, a 15 hour flight which crossed over the International Dateline. We went through Customs in Joburg (as South Africans call it) then, within an hour, we were on another 2 hour flight to Cape Town. By this time we were exhausted and ready to settle in our hotel (Protea Hotel Victoria Junction) which was within walking distance of the “waterfront.” Here we met our guide Roger Harding and our 22 other traveling companions on this Gate 1 excursion.



Protea Hotel Victoria Junction



----- The Waterfront in Capetown -----

Our first touring day started the next morning with a peninsula tour of the Cape Town area, and since it was a sunny day, our guide began the day with a stop at the most famous point in Cape Town – an area known as Table Mountain. On November 11, 2011, Table Mountain was named among the New Seven Wonders of Nature. It is a flat-topped mountain forming a prominent landmark overlooking the city of Cape Town. The best views of the city are from the top which is accessible by cable car.



Entering Table Mountain



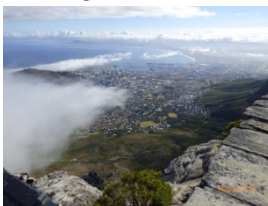
Looking up to the mountain



Sign at Cable Car Entrance



Picture of Cable Car



View of Cape Town



Table Mountain Model

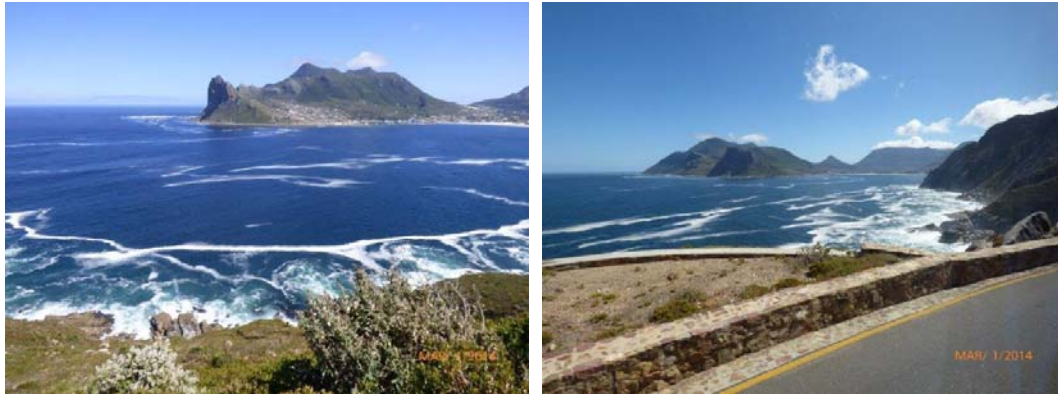


Carey & Donna at Sign



Watching mountain climbers

After Table Mountain we drove, by bus, to Cape Point which is a Natural World Heritage Site located within Table Mountain National Park. Along the way we had our first sighting of baboons and ostriches. Cape Point is a nature enthusiast paradise and lies at the southwest tip of the Cape Peninsula.



Just before lunch we stopped at the Boulders Penguin Colony. There are only a few places on Earth where you can get this close to a breeding colony of penguins.



Before heading back to the hotel we made one final stop at the world famous Cape of Good Hope, the southwestern most point on the African continent. The Cape of Good Hope marks the point where a ship begins to travel more eastward than southward. The first modern rounding of the cape in 1488 by Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias was a milestone in the attempts by the Portuguese to establish direct trade relations with the Far East. Dias called the cape *Cabo das Tormentas* ("Cape of Storms"), which was the original name of the "Cape of Good Hope".





On Day #2 we toured the city of Cape Town, which began with a visit to the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Gardens, a UNESCO World Heritage site. The garden is one of nine National Botanical Gardens covering five of South Africa's six different biomes. When Kirstenbosch was founded in 1913 to preserve the country's unique flora, it was the first botanical garden in the world with this ethos. What makes the Gardens so famous worldwide is that (with minor exceptions) only indigenous plants are cultivated here.



The balance of the day was spent touring various other parts of the city. We visited an area where a high concentration of Muslims reside. Their unique homes of different colors are a trademark of the area. We happen to visit when there was a funeral in progress. All the locals participate in every funeral as a show of support and condolence for the family of the deceased.



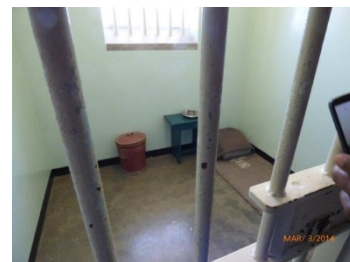
On Day #3 we were given time to do whatever we wanted, so we started the day with a brisk walk for several blocks near our hotel, past Cape Town Stadium, the site of the 2010 World Cup Soccer Championship games. In the afternoon we took a ferry ride to Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was incarcerated for 18 of the 27 years he was behind bars. We toured the prison and took pictures of the cell block and his cell.



View of Cape Town from Robben Island



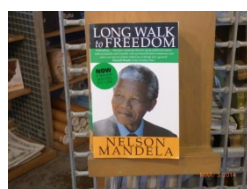
Restored Section of the Jail



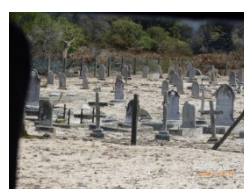
Nelson Mandela's Cell



Prison Entrance



Mandela's Book



Cemetery on the Island



Island Coastal Area



Leaving Robben Island

That evening we attended a home hosted dinner at the home of a South African family. The food was delicious and fellowship with the family was both interesting and enlightening, but not quite what we expected.



Having completed our tour of Cape Town we were now on our way to Durban which is a small town east of Johannesburg. After our early morning flight on British Airways, we were loaded on a bus headed for the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Game Reserve. We crossed over into the Kingdom of Swaziland and upon reaching the reserve we boarded a small river boat and floated through the mangrove swamps observing hippos, croc's, and various species of birds.



Our boat



Hippos



Croc's

After the river cruise we drove in Swaziland for miles, then arrived at the Happy Valley Hotel where we stayed for the night. The next morning we were on our way to our first "game drive." The Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Game Reserve is teeming with wildlife, and unfortunately, some poachers. The day before we arrived poachers had shot and removed the horn from one of the reserves rhinos. We heard that one of the rangers had accepted a bribe and allowed the poachers in the park. They had so badly disfigured the rhino that the park staff had to put the animal down. This happens too frequently in this part of the world, and rhino horns are like gold in various markets in Asia. This event, coupled with rain showers most of the day, dampened our spirit somewhat, nevertheless, we proceeded with the game drive and got some amazing pictures of giraffes, and baboons.



Female & Male Giraffes



Donna close up with the giraffe



Male Baboon



The next morning we continued on our way through Swaziland; stopped at various tourist shops along the way, one in particular was called the Swazi Candle Factory, where there were hand carved candles of the Big 5 African animals, as well as numerous other wax figures and designs. There were many other crafts in this area and we all decided it was a typical “tourist trap,” but a nice stop for a bathroom break anyway. Further along the route we stopped at the Ngwenya Glass Factory where we saw live peacocks and had a chance to observe the glass pieces being made, all of which are made from recycled glass.



That evening we returned to South Africa and stayed at the Hazyview Hotel – one of my personal favorites. It was the best room of all the hotels we stayed in and it had a pool, great food and easy to use wifi. The next morning we entered Kruger National Park. This park is the size of New Jersey and has some of the best game viewing opportunities on Earth. The weather was good and we spotted lots of steenbok, zebra, impala, rhino, elephant and even a very rare sighting of a leopard. This was a great day.



Steenbok



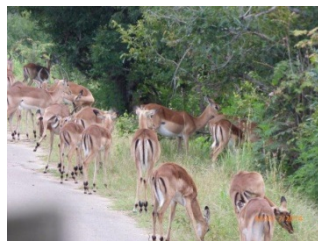
Elephant



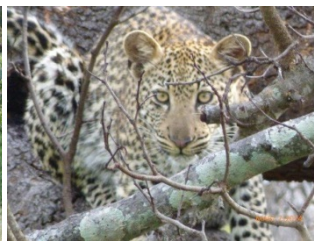
Zebra



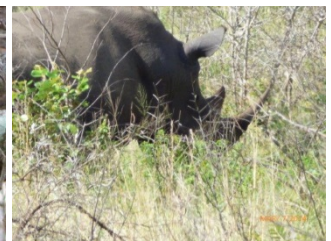
Water Monitor



Impala



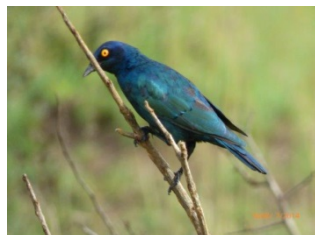
Leopard



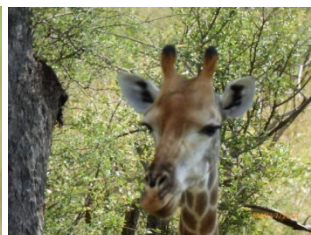
Black Rhino



Wildbeast



Cape Glossy Starling



Baby Giraffe



Our Open-Air Vehicle

All of the pictures featured in this report were taken with one of the three cameras we had with us on this trip. Most were shot with our Panasonic Lumix camera with a 60X zoom lens. Check out the leopard photo above.



After breakfast the next morning we hopped on the bus again and headed back to Johannesburg via the “Panorama Route.” On the way our first stop was at the Blyde River Canyon lookout point known as Gods Window, a vista at the edge of the escarpment overlooking Kruger National Park. From there we visited Bourke’s Luck Potholes which is a spectacular series of waterfalls and rock formations created by water erosion over the eons.



Blyde River Canyon Entrance



Gods Window



Carey & Donna at Lookout Point



One of the flowers in the area



----- Burk's Luck Potholes & Waterfalls -----

We arrived at the Protea Hotel Fire & Ice in Johannesburg early evening and spent the night at leisure. The next morning we were on our way to Soweto (South Western Township) the home of both Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela. Both are recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize, and, they lived on the same street. We spent some time at the home of Nelson Mandela before moving on to the Hector Peterson museum nearby. Hector Peterson, a teenager at the time, was the first person shot and killed during the civil strife that resulted from the Apartheid government. The museum in his name was built to display the events and honor the many who died during the uprising.



Cooling Towers – Symbol of Soweto



----- Mandela's House -----



Quote in front of house



Desmond Tutu & Nelson Mandela



RIP Monument to Mandela



Road Sign



Entrance to Peterson Museum

**Apartheid was a former social system in South Africa in which black people and people from other racial groups did not have the same political and economic rights as white people and were forced to live separately from white people.**



After lunch we visited the Apartheid museum where we journeyed through the racial segregation experienced by millions of South Africans just over a decade ago. In the evening we had a farewell dinner at a local restaurant. It was farewell to 20 of our fellow travelers who didn't sign-up for the extension trip into Zimbabwe and Botswana.

The next morning (day 12 of our trip) we got up early and flew to Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. At customs we paid \$90. for our visa then took our smaller tour bus to the Victoria Falls Safari Lodge. After settling in, we headed for our elephant back safari through the bush in Zimbabwe. At the end of the ride we had an opportunity to feed the elephants and we even got to pet an adult cheetah.



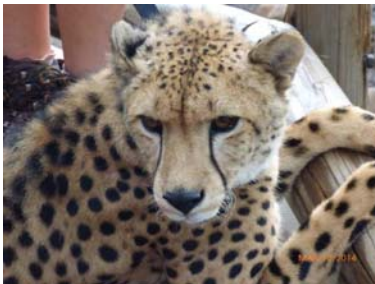
Arrival at the airport



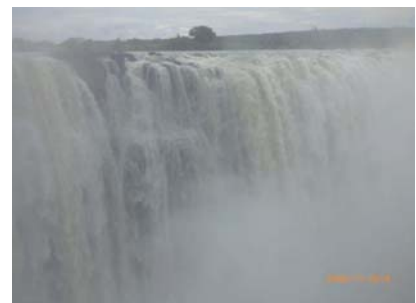
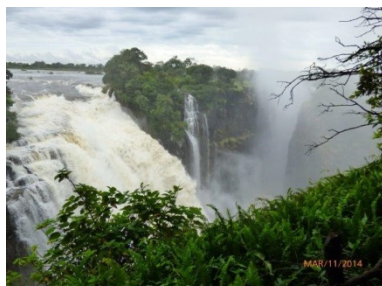
Our hotel room – mosquito netting



Introduction to our elephant



After regaining our composure we headed back to the hotel for the night. The next morning we got to experience the awesome power of Victoria Falls – one of the 7 Natural Wonders of the World.





The falls are a little over a mile wide and 351 feet high, making them one and a half times as wide and twice as high as Niagara Falls. They separate two countries, Zimbabwe and Zambia and are part of the Zambezi River. It is the worlds largest sheet of falling water.

Later that day we took a Sundowner cruise on the Zambezi River. We saw our first wart hog along with several hippos and crocodiles.



On Board the River Cruiser



Wart Hog



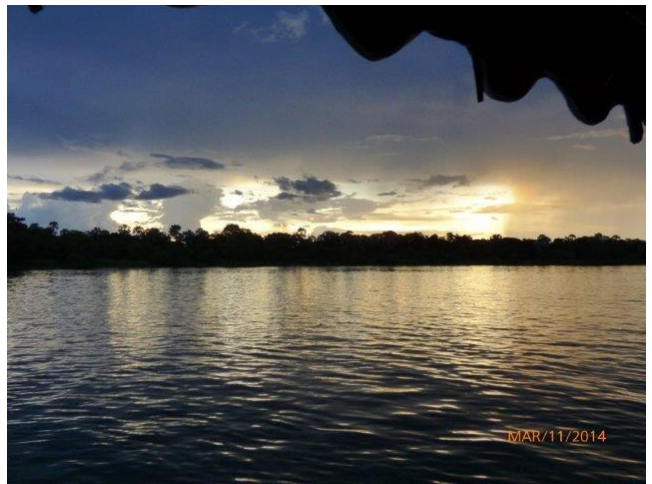
Hippo



Very Large Crocodile

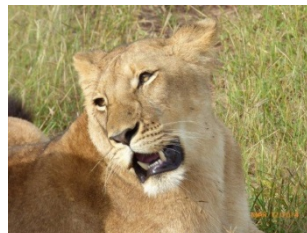


River Cruiser with plume from Victoria Falls in the background



Sunset as we approach the dock

The next morning we woke up early to do a “walk with the lions.” This was one of the most unique things we’ve ever done. It was an experience we will never forget. They were two - 18 month old lion cubs.





The next morning we boarded the van and headed for Botswana. We passed through Customs and drove to our next hotel – Chobe Marina Lodge just on the edge of Chobe National Park. The park is widely known for its spectacular elephant population: It contains an estimated 70,000 elephants, perhaps the highest elephant concentration of Africa, and part of the largest continuous surviving elephant population. It also has the largest concentration of other game animals in all of Africa. This was clearly one of the highlights of our trip. Our first event was a cruise on the Chobe River.



Entrance to Chobe Marina Lodge



Welcome to Botswana



Our Room



Flags of Many African Countries



Our Safari Boat



Water Monitor



Blue Cheeked Bee-Eater



Kudu



Hippo – Grazing



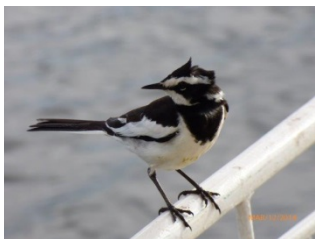
Charging Elephant



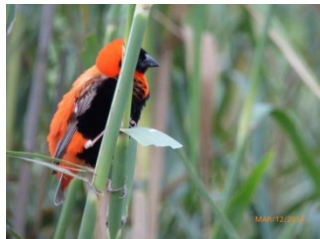
African Sacred Ibis



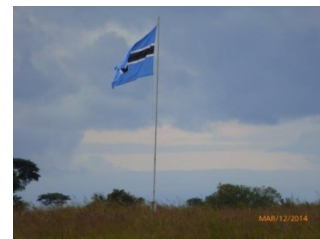
Great Egrets



Pied Kingfisher



Southern Red Bishop



Flag of Botswana on island



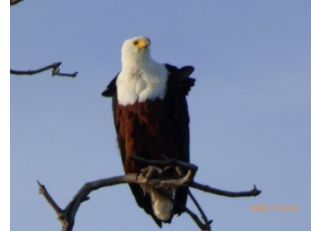
Entering the dock area

The following day we took both a morning and afternoon game drive in Chobe National Park. One thing is a given in Chobe: just a brief drive along any of its roads quickly reveals a torn branch, a trumpeting call, an enormous grey shape ghosting out of the bush ...all the unmistakable signs that this is elephant territory. At Chobe you can get so close to elephants that you can hear the deep rumblings as they communicate with each other. Elephants living here are Kalahari elephants, the largest in size of all known elephant subspecies. Other birds and animals are prevalent throughout the park. See photos on the next page.





Cape Buffalo



African Fish Eagle



Baboons



Lilac-Breasted Roller



Coffe/Tea / Biscuits on Safari



Little Bee-Eater



Zebra



African Tortoise



Lappet-Faced Vulture



Giraffe



Mother & Baby Elephant



Impala

The next morning was our last day in Africa and we made the best of it. We took a morning game drive in search of lions. The search was successful even though our pictures leave something to be desired.



Lion feasting on a baby zebra



Mother zebra searching for her baby



Spotted Hyena following the lions

After our lion encounter we quickly made our way back to the lodge to shower and pack for our 9:30am departure. We traveled by safari vehicle to the Botswana border to cross back over into Zimbabwe again where we could catch a flight from Victoria Falls to Johannesburg. We had a 4 hour layover in Joburg and departed around 9:00pm. We were in flight for 15-1/2 hours to New York, where we boarded another plane from JFK to LAX, and then another to Denver. We were delayed in Denver due to some airline issues, but finally made it home 2 days later. As our journey came to a close I will leave you with a picture of sunset over the Chobe river in Botswana. It was incredibly beautiful in Africa and it was a trip we will never forget. Checkout the photo on the next page. It is one that reflects the glory and magnificent of this continent.

Best Wishes to All - Carey & Donna Beamesderfer





**Sunset in Botswana – Overlooking the Chobe River**