

BACKROADS OF THE KAROO - THE REAL KAROO EXPERIENCE - 2008

DAY 1 - CAPE TOWN TO DIE HEL:

Can't believe that these crazy owner's of mine are up at this ridiculous time of the morning. Wonder what's up? Looks serious 'cos they're wearing all their off-road protective gear. This could be fun.

Hey, we're stopping at the Winelands one-stop and looky there..... a Dakar and a 1150GSA and their owners are coming over to chat. That's Robbie (owner of the Dakar) and Tony (owner of the 1150).

There's Theuns (video man & bakkie driver) and Leon (photographer) in the backup bakkie. This is definitely going to be fun!

Now what, we're stopping again before the tunnel? Oh, of course, we need to wait for Danie and Kobie on their 1200GSA and Joanita and Phillip in their Colt bakkie.

A breakfast stop at Touwsriver was most welcome - we can recommend the "Steers" Bacon & Egg Pita.



Now it's off to Prins Albert and to check what's happening at the annual Olive Festival. Lots of food stalls with local cuisine, a vintage vehicle procession, interesting bicycles, the "Kaapse Klopse" and lots more.



If one more Prins Albert dog p**s against my tyres.....!!

Time to deflate tyres, hit the dust and get away from the maddening crowd/dogs. This is what it's all about. Wow, this Swartberg pass is sure beautiful. Stunning scenery - just a pity about all the traffic. Must be as a result of the Olive Festival in town and all the write-ups which the pass has received in the press lately.

At the top of the pass my owners (Gerhard & Deirdre) had a little "side stand incident". Need I say more. Only damage done was a bruise on Deirdre's arm in her aborted attempt to try and prevent me from lying, very unladylike on my side.





After some of the recent reports about Die Hel we were expecting really bad roads with lots of sharp rocks. Fortunately there was very little of that and, apart from an inconsiderate bakkie driver or two, our trip into the Hel was beautiful and pretty easy on my feet - I mean tyres.

Peace and quiet reigns supreme in Die Hel and a visit to the museum was most interesting and informative.

The Colt bakkie didn't have nearly as easy a ride downhill as us bikes did and once we arrived at the campsite everyone helped Phillip plug a hole in one of his tyres.

"Piet se Staning" proved to be a nice campsite with shady sites, clean ablutions and plenty of hot water.

The agenda for the evening was an early braai and off to bed.



DAY 2 - DIE HEL TO BAVIAANSKLOOF: Well, they say that women have a bad sense of direction, but this morning Tony took the prize. What was meant to be a 20 minute run turned out to be an hour run 'cos he missed the turning into the campsite. He said it was dark or something feeble like that....

We said our goodbyes to Joanita and Phillip as they were staying in Die Hel for one more day and then heading home.

The ride out of Die Hel and the Gamkaskloof was beautiful. Some steep ascents, but the roads were generally in pretty good condition.

We turned towards Oudtshoorn and stopped at "Wilgewandel" for breakfast. This place can definitely be recommended. Food was good and the service and concept was excellent.

Goody, back to gravel. We made our way to Willowmore as a few of us (bikes) were thirsty by now and we needed some "juice".

The road into the Western entrance of Baviaanskloof is beautiful. Lush vegetation and amazing rock formations. Organising the "donkey" at Makkedaat campsite was an interesting exercise and I think that cold showers were pretty much the order of the day.

Please don't let Robbie read you bedtime stories 'cos he can't even stay awake when reading whilst the sun 's still shining. Power nap????

If you had to have a cold shower to be able to braai outside under such a stunning night sky, then it was well worth every drop of Arctic water.

DAY 3 - BAVIAANSKLOOF (Makkedaat to Kudu-Kaya):



Today is the day we've all been waiting for. Robbie is very scathing about Tony's "fat chick" (his affectionate name for his 1150) and says something about wanting to see him falling in the water (those two are like naughty little boys the way they rag each other - all in good fun of course).

The water crossings were not too challenging. There were very few holes and our owners simply pushed our noses in the right direction. Everyone (bikes, humans and bakkie) enjoyed the photo opportunities, but there was no need for underwater photography.

Staying cool is easy. It's misty and the air is nippy.

Perfect biking weather.

If you didn't know better you'd think that everyone had a "little too much to drink for breakfast". Choosing a straight line is virtually impossible and the two pillions (Kobie and Deirdre) are having to do a few impressive balancing acts. Nasty rocky outcrops in the middle of the road followed by stepped drops in places make the ride more challenging than we've had thus far. Weight placement plays an important role and everyone is constantly discovering points of gravity in new places. Learnt an interesting truth today. It goes like this: Confucius says, "The best line is always 2cms and less away from the drop-off edge". The surface provides

pretty good footing, sorry, traction and the only one lagging is Theuns. Having two wheels definitely has its advantages over four at times. All I hear over and over again is "If only we had helmet cams". The scenery is stunningly beautiful, but capturing it isn't easy.

Kudu-Kaya (our stop over for the night) is beautiful and we're lucky enough to get a campsite away from all the other campers in a Knysna forest type setting.

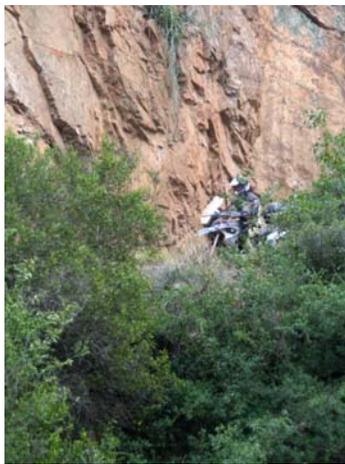
Ablutions were great and the friendly farmer (Petrus) stocked us with firelogs for the evening - first time any of us had kept a fire going with orange trees (dead, legally acquired orange trees, that is).



DAY 4 - BAVIAANSKLOOF TO MURRAYSBURG:

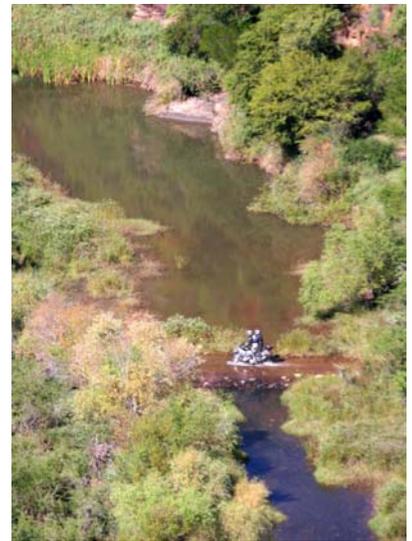
The breakfast at Padlans in Patensie was most enjoyable and also dished up (pun intended) a few amusing moments. Theuns and Robbie ordered tea. When you're in the company of fellow dusty off-road bikers and 4x4'ers and your waitress delivers your tea in a pretty pink floral tea cup

Just outside Patensie we turn off onto another gravel road. Wow, we thought it was only Bavianskloof that was going to be technically challenging. This road has some of it's own little surprises. Loose sand which seems to suddenly appear out of nowhere, dried mud which has left huge ruts in the road and big rocks which need to be navigated around provide some interesting moments.



The scenes all around are amazing. 360 degrees of unadulterated beauty. Green rolling hills, river valleys, stone ruins of houses from a bygone era and amazing flora. The beauty seems to be never-ending and it just carries on and on.

Suddenly the landscape starts changing. The beautiful green is replaced by Karoo type landscape and greens turn to browns and greys. A quick relief stop at Steytlerville (fortunately no dogs roaming the streets here) and then off to Klipplaat.



Hey, there's an old steam locomotive parked in the middle of nowhere on a mound of gravel. Of course Gerhard, Tony, Robbie and Danie couldn't resist. Up we ride for a photoshoot.



Ouch, that was sore. There goes my bashplate. As we came down from the mound of gravel something ripped and it felt like my guts were being pulled out. The patent on the bashplate of the 1200GS leaves much to be desired.

Whilst I'm dumped on my side and patched up with wire and a Leatherman, Robbie is providing the entertainment of the year for the school kids. School is just out and the kids are all standing around watching the repairs. Robbie decides to play Good Samaritan and starts taking the kids (two by two on the back of his Dakar) for a little ride up and down the road. It's amazing how quickly kids start appearing out of nowhere and Robbie looks like he's destined to spend the



weekend providing rides. Eventually it's time to say "Last ride. Choose only two more ". The two smallest little kids are helped onto the Dakar by the others and the excitement and smiles were priceless. Robbie made lots of dreams come true that day and provided endless memories and excitement.

The backroad to Aberdeen is fast going in places and some bumps and unexpected holes provide a few adrenalin rushes.

Upgrading of the Aberdeen to Murraysburg road makes the ride very pleasant and relaxing. The gravel almost looks and feels like tar.



Over the single carriageway bridge and the gate to Sekretariskraal suddenly appears between the thorn trees.

Hettie and Frans du Preez (the owners of Sekretariskraal) are there to greet us with the usual welcoming Karoo hospitality which is well-known in this area. You almost feel like you're arriving home even though you know you're miles away from home.



Sitting round a campfire under bright stars and a clear Milky Way with the smell of thornwood in the air, must be one of the most soul-satisfying things anyone can experience.

After a long, but amazingly satisfying day everyone is happy to shower and "hit the sack".



DAY 5 - MURRAYSBURG (Kapoksplaas and Matjiesfontein):

Geez, my buns are freezing. Danie checks the temperature gauge on his Adventure and it measures 1°C.

Like all "farm girls", Hettie knows how to cook (homebaked bread comes standard) and meals are a "wholesome" affair. The Sekretariskraal farmhouse is a museum in it's own right and Frans and Hettie happily share the area's history and stories with us.



"All Pay" in Murraysburg is an experience. This is the once a month payout of pensions, disability and other government grants. How do they expect a bike to weave between children and everything and anything that moves and is set on standing in the middle of the road. Fortunately we're early and the fruits of the vine haven't had too much of a chance to take effect yet.

Oom Dam's (Danie Roussouw) farm, Kapoksplaas, is about 12kms outside of town. Once you leave the main gravel road

and go through the farm gate the ride is slow-going and it's time to enjoy the Karoo countryside at a slow pace. Oom Dammetjie is his usual friendly, chatty self and he gives us the key to the neighbouring farm's gate as we leave. The ride down to and through Matjiesfontein is beautiful and provides some steep rocky descents and loose sandy river crossings. The embarrassing part is when you feel like a hero after you've managed to go across some pretty rough terrain and the farmer proceeds to tell you that he went through there yesterday in his normal Toyota farm bakkie.



A quick trip to Retreat (Oom Dammetjie's other farm) provided a few interesting moments. Deirdre and Gerhard took me onto the dry dam which proved to be dry and SOFT. A quick dismount by Deirdre saved the day and saved face. Unbeknown to the rest of us, Kobie



and Danie were experiencing a similar incident at the muddy river crossing, at more or less the same time.

The afternoon ride on Dalena's farm, Middelkraal, made us realise the magnitude of some of these Karoo farms. "I wonder if Robbie saw what kind of tree that was?". The Dakar's front wheel went out of the track and Robbie had to duck quickly to avoid the tree. "Robbie, Red Bull doesn't really give you wings". A nice flying dismount from a Dakar at 0.5kms per hour is quite amusing once you've established that the rider hasn't injured himself, nor his bike. As was said earlier, two wheels sometimes have their advantages. Theuns takes his Toyota bakkie through a short little river crossing and the exit angle proves to be a bit of a problem. Nothing a few well-placed rocks can't sort out though. Dalena is Oom Dammetjie's daughter and seeing as it's Oom Dammetjie's birthday that Friday (and all three of his daughters and their husbands were coming round to dinner that evening) we were all invited to join them at the family, birthday braai.



The farmhouse is beautiful and the old Oregon pine floors, doors, door frames and window frames having been lovingly restored.

Driving home after midnight with full stomachs and on farm roads where Kudus and wildlife abound calls for some serious concentration and slow driving (about 20kms back to Sekretariskraal). What's that funny lomp looking creature running in the road? It's about the size of large Labrador and doesn't move terribly fast. As it turns out of the road we can see its snout. It's the unmistakable snout of an Aardvark. Off-road biking sure hones your prayer skills. Lots of prayers are said on these types of trips and especially at times like this. Fortunately ours were answered and we arrived back "home" safely.

DAY 6 - MURRAYSBURG (Toverwater, Rooipoort, Beeldhouersfontein and Komsplaas):



The drive to Toverwater takes us past a game farm. Close to the fence we see Gemsbok (Oryx), Zebras and Springbuck. Stop, stop!!! What an amazing site. Here just before the farmhouse at

Toverwater is a stunningly beautiful waterfall. If you were transported here blindfolded, you'd never ever guess that you were in the middle of the Karoo. A ±45 metre drop down into a bottomless black river pool, surrounded by yellow poplar trees and lush green bushes makes for a perfect fairytale setting. You have to see the pictures (or better still, get to go there yourself) to believe the beauty of this site.

Not far from there we stop at Rooipoort. The farm is owned by Alida and Jannie Pienaar and guess what.... Yes, you're right. Alida invites us in for coffee and a chat. Rooipoort is the home to three tame springbuck. Two of who have "starred" in TV commercials and the other's claim to fame is that he is a rare white/albino Springbuck.

Rain is threatening, but democracy rules and the vote is to continue with the trip to Beeldhouersfontein. Lena and Kotie van den Berg's three golden Labradors run out to greet us and, yes, the male lifts his leg.

From the farmhouse we climb steeply. Down and up again, until we reach the deserted farm house on Komsplaas. Here Tony is shown how to pick up his "Fat Chick". Not because he had to, but because he didn't know how to and didn't believe that he could do it, and with such relative ease.

The ascents back to the farmhouse are pretty technical. Robbie has been struggling with a cold/flu since the beginning of the trip and the physical exertion begins to affect his concentration levels. The Dakar is put down



(very neatly, may I add) on two occasions before we reach the top. No damage done to bike nor man. The flat gravel road "home" is somewhat boring, but is welcomed after the technical, exerting ride we've just had. Hot medication in a mug is the only liquid refreshment for Robbie and then straight into bed to sleep it off.

DAY 7 - MURRAYSBURG (Nieu Bethesda and Graaff-Reinet):



We say our goodbyes to Robbie and Tony. Robbie needs to get to a doctor as his cold/flu has taken a turn for the worse. It's a weird feeling and as we ride off without the other two. It almost feels like we've had an arm chopped off.

As soon as we can, we turn off the tar road and head toward Nieu Bethesda on gravel.



Danie checks the temperature and it's varying between 8 and 10 degrees. Driving through the quaint town of Nieu Bethesda one sees many nicely renovated homes. A coffee stop and then a tour



through the Owl House concludes our visit here and we head for Graaff-Reinet. Shoot, what was that? A little buck runs across the road in front of us, rebounds off the fence, turns around and runs out in front of Kobie and Danie. Thank heavens for the emergency braking training. The buck runs off unharmed and Kobie and Danie (a whiter shade of pale, but fine) continue on their way.

Regular SMS's from Robbie and Tony assure us of their safety as they continue on their journey back to Cape Town. Can you believe it? Traffic officers stopped Tony and Robbie in Leeu Gamka and fined them R500 each because their number plates were dusty.



Duh..... Surely they could see that the bikes and the riders were also dusty and that this was a genuine case of dust on the numberplates? Sounds like arguing wasn't an option and even wiping their plates clean didn't do the trick. It's amazing the affect uniforms have on some people's attitudes!!



Kobie, Danie, Theuns and Leon carried on to Graaff-Reinet where they planned to make a quick lunch stop. We carried on to Murraysburg to go and say our goodbyes to Oom Dammetjie, Tannie Lena (his wife) and the rest of their family who were still staying with them. Meeting up again at Sekretariskraal, everyone had been duly impressed by the beauty and quietness of the Valley of Desolation (just outside Graaff-Reinet).



Sitting round our last campfire of the trip there is a sense of sadness. Sad that Robbie and Tony aren't here enjoying this with us and sad that we have to go back to "civilisation" tomorrow.



Supper is a real "Boerekos" affair. Soft succulent Karoo chops, freshly picked garden beans & potato mashed together, pumpkin, rice and the list goes on and on. If a "boerevrou" prepares a meal for you, you definitely won't be able to say that you're still hungry after the meal.

The Sekretariskraal Guest Book is signed with a great deal of sadness, but we all know that after an amazing trip like we've had, we will DEFINITELY be back.

Our goodbyes are said to Frans and Hettie and it's off to bed.

DAY 8 - MURRAYSBURG TO CAPE TOWN:

Hallo, it's cold, it's dark and it's raining and you want to go where? Gravel roads and rain really don't go together very well. Fortunately it's only 21km to the tar road. The rain isn't very hard and it hasn't been raining for too long, so the roads are only starting to become slimey. The bakkie drives ahead and takes our toasted sandwiches and coffee orders, which we're fortunately able to place over the two-way radios. Arriving at the garage to hot coffee and hot sandwiches is a treat and some of us have discovered that our "rain-proof" gear isn't all that rain-proof. The closer we get to Cape Town the more the weather improves, but the more our spirits drop as reality begins to set in and we realise that this really is the end of an absolutely amazing trip. The general concensus in the group is that we've all done many biking trips before, but this one has somehow, unquestionably, been the BEST!!!!

May there be many more of these amazing trips with the amazing people who were part of the trip.

