

Mabuasehube - 2013

Friday morning, 01:00 - The Thunder Rolls – The Great Escape!

The Cast:

- Heine and Mandy in Bo (2011 79 Series Bakkie with lots of toys!)
- Bruce and Elmarie and an as yet unnamed Defender Puma towing an Explorer
- Mike and Estelle in their new Cruiser (1993 GX – 4.0 litre 3F) towing an Oryx
- Eric and Margaret in the Transmogrifier (2008 79 Series Bakkie with some toys)

(Apologies in advance – we did not take many pictures. The others (especially Heine) took tonnes – and when they do their write-ups – I am sure that you will get more pictures. The ones I did take, can be viewed at

<https://plus.google.com/photos/104454475172096801949/albums/5913357451614013969?authkey=CljU3JLGqv-xjqE>)

With the skies dark and gloomy, we met at Oaktree minus Heine who would be coming later due to a meeting commitment on Mandy's part in the morning. After a bit of chit chat, and since the temperature is not exactly balmy, at 04:20 - we're off.

Things progressed well, with a little rain now and then, no issues. Bruce in front, Mike in the rear and us in the middle.

Just past Ventersdorp, Mike calls about something having gone pop and he pulls over.

We go back and discover that the pop is actually the small hose between the thermostat housing and the waterpump. It is destroyed. As in properly!

hmmmm

Self Vulcanizing tape - here we come. With a piece of reinforced garden hose, and a roll of vulcanizing tape and two new clamps we made a hose. Fastened it, and after a series of phone calls, emails and facebook posts, got in touch with a contact in Coligny who confirmed that we could continue to Coligny with the radiator cap off and he would help sort out the problem there!

Open rad cap, hook Estelle's Vanity Case to my truck and 30 minutes later we arrive in Coligny and were met by a mate of Mike's from the Bridgestone Marshals who took us to a workshop where he had several suitable pieces of pipe. He replaced the pipe with one of those, also got a spare one, topped up the radiator, checked it out, attached the vanity case back to Mike's cruiser and we were off.

During all of this, Heine had been contacted and he was collecting some hose and clamps and would bring in any case. One never knows.

We were now well behind schedule, but hey - "We're going on a Holiday!" as Estelle kept singing, and off we went.

What happened next can only be described as WTF?

We were not 10 kms down the road when Mike calls out that he is starting to run hot. We pull over, check it out, and decide that in the interests of keeping his engine safe, I would once again pull his trailer. A little while later Mike reports that it is fine – an air bubble is suspected. A stop go appears and we make use of the downtime to swap the vanity case back to Mike.

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This only lasts for mere 3 or 4 kms (if that) and it gets hot again. We pull over. This time we remove the thermostat as we suspect it might be the problem, the spots and the registration plate also are removed in order to give the rad the most air possible.

It is no longer a case of Mike continuing the trip, but getting him to a decent workshop to repair the now ailing 20 year old 3F. The problem could be almost anything, from the blocked radiator, to a weak pump, to a blown gasket. We don't know. Going back is not an option, the nearest real town is 70 kms ahead (Vryburg) and behind us it would be home – considerably further!

Some debate later, I hook up the vanity case again, Mike runs in front at a speed that will not harm or overheat the engine and off we go. Soon however, we are down from 70 to 60 to 50 to 40 and then we have to stop altogether. The temperature is now in the red, and it does not want to come down. Cr@p - we don't have a tow vehicle anymore as both of the others have caravans behind them.

Then, like a white knight riding out of the mist, here comes Heine! A few other "friends" passed us on the N14 while we were standing, happily tooting at us and waving, but not stopping. Dennis did call to ask if we needed help, but there would not have been much they could have done as they also had trailers behind them.

After some hellos, Mike is put on a tow rope and the last 40 kms to Vryburg goes quickly. We pull up to the Silverton's Radiator shop where Mike had arranged to meet the specialist.

A series of tests and investigations, and the thought is that it might be the rad cap! So, a new cap is installed and Mike is off to test.. Nope - not the problem. Luke - the workshop manager for Toyota is called, and arrangements are made for Mike to meet them tomorrow morning.

Time is now marching on quite quickly, and if we are going to get through to Cullinan Guest Farm tonight, we need to hustle. To make sure Mike and Estelle are in a safe place for the night, we tow their caravan to Camelthorn lodge and we part ways. Mike will go through to Toyota in the morning and get the problem diagnosed. We are hopeful that they will join us a day later. After all, how difficult can it be? We still have 300 kms to go and we have a nice dinner waiting for us! ☺

After a few more stop and goes, we reach Kuruman at 17:30 and proceed to the Total garage to top up the tanks. Once completed, we head off to north, Hotazel and Blackrock on the horizon behind a stunning sunset. The road from Kuruman to Hotazel is mostly completed with only a few places left to be finished. MUCH MUCH better than two years ago when that road was a disaster! It is now a pleasure to drive. In no time we are there, past and on the way to Blackrock, which also went very quickly.

Just past Blackrock the road turns to gravel and we stopped to deflate tyres, (I drop mine to 1 on front and 2 on rears) get in touch with Marda (Cullinan Guest lodge) again (we had kept her up to date with our progress all during the day) to give her the latest update and that we would be there by 20:30

The gravel road is not all that bad, but there are sections of some shitty corrugations, but driving it at night makes for some interesting interpretations of which side you should be on. The first 20 kms were the worst, and after that it settled down to a normal, medium maintained gravel road.

Anyway, we arrive at 20h30 and were warmly greeted by Marda and Bennie. Introductions are done and we head to our rooms. Bruce arrives a few minutes later and by 9pm we are sitting down to a scrumptious dinner of Gemsbok sirloin, Chicken, Peas, Rice and Sweet Potato, and a bottle of red. Marda and Bennie are good hosts, and Marda makes good food. It wasn't 2 hours later and we are all done, and into our beds.

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Heine and Bruce had originally said they would camp, but with Mike not being there to take his room, Heine took that (Thanks Mike) and I arranged for another room for Bruce and Elmarie. It had been a long day, and setting up, even a caravan at 11pm, would not be nice. Plus it was shaping up to be a very cold morning the next day, and there were absolutely no complaints about having to sleep in a house, with a nice warm bed and a good hot shower.

And that folks, is the end of Day one. It was long. 15+ hours, lots of drama, we were tuckered out. We started out with 3 vehicles, we ended up with three vehicles. It was supposed to have been four, but we had high hopes Mike would catch up with us tomorrow evening.

Departed : 03:49
Arrived : 20:35
Distance : 706 kms
Average Speed : 42 kph
Moving Average: 74 kph
Max Speed : 120 kph

Fuel Consumption to Kuruman : 6.2 kpl or 16 l/100

Compared to 2 years ago, 6.3 kpl (to Hotazel) but not towing anything at that time. Then no Turbo, now with Turbo.

Saturday – Comedy Central – Just Khiding!

Saturday morning we are all up around 07h30 getting various little things sorted before breakfast. At 08h00(ish), we wander into a delicious breakfast of fruit, yogurt, eggs, toast and homemade jams. Sausages and some fried mushroom rounded out the meal. It was also Bruce's 41st birthday, and a little sing song took place – Which Marda and Bennie joined in!

By 08h30 we are finished, and leisurely make our way to the rooms to finalize getting the stuff back into the various vehicles, which did not take long. Just before 9am we said our goodbyes to Marda and Bennie and headed for the border.

At the border, a typical crossing and as the systems were down, everything had to be done by hand. Cursory vehicle checks, checks our licenses, and off we went.

Not much quicker on the Botswana side, but everyone friendly and chatty, we were soon done and on our way. Heine got asked to show the man at the gate something, but Bruce and I just got waved through.

Heading up the little tar road on the way to Tsabong (also spelt Tshabong), we stopped to collect some suitable logs for the fire. A little bit of chit chat, and off again. No hurry, because "We're all going on a, Holiday" (A little tune the Estelle likes to sing, and we got it stuck into Bruce's head! ☺)

Soon in Tsabong, we asked if there was any firewood for sale. They gave us a strange look and "Eish - you get the firewood in the bush!" So, with that advice, off we headed northwest on the road to Mabuasehube.

The first 20kms, as normal, is horribly corrugated and no fun at all. Around 94 kms from the gate, the road gets noticeably better and the further north we went the better it got. At 42kms from the gate, Heine pulled over and got hold of Mike on the Satphone to get an update. Apparently, the radiator is horribly blocked. That is good news. The bad news is that it cannot be repaired until Monday. The daughter of one of the rad places in town is getting married. The owner of the OTHER rad shop in town

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is hosting the party. Everyone who knows anything about radiators is going to the wedding and there is nobody to open the shop up. Mike has to wait. So, he will get the rad sorted on Monday, and will come join us at Mabua #1 on Tuesday.

After a fat chat on the side of the road we carry on towards the park. Around 39kms to go to the gate, the gravel road stops and the sand track begins. We slowed down from 70kph to between 20 and 40. With Bruce towing the caravan, it is difficult to go any faster. Heine drops back and pulls in behind Bruce. We bring up the rear. I spot another victim for the fire and stop to load it onto the roof. Tie it down and now go make up the 10 km gap that has been opened up between Bruce and us. We caught them with 1.6 kms to go to the gate just as they were turning in.

Formalities at the gate were quick and shortly we are on our way to Mpayathutlwa pan, and then northwest to Khiding Pan. We arrive at the site, and get started with setting up.

The meal arrangements were a little skewed as Mike and Estelle had been on the roster to cook first, with Bruce and Elmarie providing the pre-dinner snack. We move our slot up one day and do the dinner. Duck breast, scored and seasoned with salt, pepper, Italian herbs and sage, pan fried skin down for 8 minutes, then turned and top griller on the oven turned on. 5 minutes later, out to rest while the mint peas, turnip & Potato mash (with Gruyere and mustard). Cherry compote as the sauce for the Duck.

We adjourned to the fire. Although it was not late, soon everyone was heading for their various hotels to get a good night sleep! We had JUST dozed off and a bunch of jackals came howling past. Sounded like they came right through camp. Three seconds later, I am asleep again!

Departed	:	09:06 (much more civilized)
Arrived	:	13:51
Distance	:	189 kms
Average Speed	:	31 kph
Moving Average:	:	50 kph
Max Speed	:	96 kph

Sunday

Sunday morning dawned cold. Not as cold as at Cullinan guest farm where the temps had hit -4C (the coldest here was 8C - so far). At 5am it was a bit cloudy, but by 06h30 when I got up to make coffee, most of the clouds were parking orf. Coffee made (Fresh ground of course), rusks and brandy coffee in hand, back into the tent to watch the pan while sipping good coffee and munching a rusk!

After another snooze, it was time to getup - now around 9am. More coffee, get the dishes from the night before done (they had been stored in the back of the truck overnight), then make breakfast, shave and a hair cut (no time before we left) and the rest of the day was thus before us. No plans for anything except to write down the events making up this journal.

By 11h40, everyone has done the breakfast thing, and binoculars and cameras are out to see what we can see.

The day degenerated into one of hiding away from the wind. As the afternoon wore on, no birds, animals or anything was sited, and it became somewhat uncomfortable. But, in typical Kalahari fashion, by dark the wind died down and a fire could be started.

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Pre-dinner snacks - Margaret made some beetroot canapés rolled with chevin, and fresh basil leaves. A variety of cheeses, crackers and some Shrimp rounded out the snack department.

Later, as the fire was lit, and the winds died down, although the temperature was heading for decidedly low single digits. Heine and Mandy made a delicious cream chicken curry with rice and curry bread. Was the perfect meal for a day which had taken its toll on everyone. (Mandy – you still owe us the recipe – you promised! ☺) Bruce found it a tad warm and thought to cool it down with some Chutney. Not looking at the bottle, he slathered it on – only to discover that it was “HOT CHUTNEY!” – didn’t help much! ☺

Later, sitting around the fire, Heine came out with 'desert', a fudge square which was very nice, but gave us a sugar rush of note! :)

That's ok, wash it down with a Bain's Cape Whiskey, and off to the showers.

Early night, most asleep by 9!

No travel stats – didn’t move! ☺

Monday

It dawned cold. Very cold. As in Minus cold! Phark it was cold. The Bed was nice and warm (Electric blanket pressed into duty), but the call of nature, which had been soundly ignored for several hours, could no longer be ignored and had to be addressed. That meant getting out of bed and to do that safely without some bits falling off due to being stuck out into the cold, one had to get dressed. Needless to say, once dressed and now starting to warm up inside your clothing, staying up was the only real option.

Kettle on (we take a 1 litre bottle of water to bed and it stays there all night so that in the morning it is around 30C) the coffee (with Brandy) is soon ready to consume. Sigh - Nice. Eyes slowing opening properly, with our breath visible in the cold air, life starts slowly. Two large crows are telling us what they think of us, the Sun is trying very hard to warm us up. Standing with our faces to the sun, coffee and rusk in hand, Margaret and I feel like a pair of Meerkats gathering in the first rays of the sun. A pair of bat eared foxes, some jackal, springbok, Gemsbok and Red Hartebeest make themselves available to the sun for warm-up as well.

Slowly the rest of the camp wakes up, coffees, breakfast and camp life starts. The wind, thankfully is only a slight breeze this morning and the temperatures slowly climb to the point that layers can be removed and a relaxing day of reading, sleeping, snoring and snacking begins.

Bruce and Elmarie go for a cruise around the pan, and spot the Bat eared foxes and the jackal that we had seen earlier in the morning. They are not gone too long however and are soon back.

The afternoon is pleasant, the birds are making their presence (finally – but in very limited numbers) and the squirrels and birds are making use of the water bath that we put out for them to drink from. So far, the squirrels have made the most use of it.

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Around lunchtime, Heine had called Mike (and handed the phone to Bruce) who gathered from Mike that the work on the radiator was progressing. His words were, "Come hell or high water, they would leave and get to at least Cullinan Guest Farm tonight" - how practical that is, or how possible, we'll see tomorrow when they hopefully arrive here to cook us an overdue dinner.

Tonight, in the altered menu roster, Heine and Mandy will be supplying the pre-dinner snacks while Bruce and Elmarie will be doing the dinner.



(this does pose a problem for Mike and Estelle tomorrow, since we have all done our snacks and dinner duties, they will need to do both snack and dinner tomorrow night - that's what you get for breaking down on the way to a week of food sharing duties - we'll wait - oh yes, we'll wait! 😊)

As the afternoon wore on, the wind started again, but quickly dropped as the sun went down in the style of the Kalahari. Bacon and Cherry skewers for starters with crisps, and then Chicken 2 ways with hobo pack veggies and baked sweet potato followed. Bruce had been planning to use Mike's Cobb as his second one so both chickens could be cooked in a cobb, however, Mike wasn't here, so we use my 'oven' to create the second one - worked well, and chicken cooked to perfection.

A good fire was built as we had enough wood, so a bit more wine was consumed. Let's just call it More.

During the late afternoon and early evening, the Brown Hyena made an appearance, along with a jackal or two, but neither got really in close. The jackals and the Hyena made a few turns while we were sitting around the fire, and later while we were lying in bed, you could hear the jackals carrying on. Ah, the sounds of the bush!

Tuesday

It is up early(ish), but not too early - we waited for the sun - and packing up to move to Mabua #1 commences. Bruce and Heine had to do a mighty trek through hill and vale, over river and mountain, though thick and thin At least, that's what they implied – to go find the lid of the Cobb which the Hyena has taken a walk with. A few teeth marks, but nothing serious! 😊

While we get all the other bits that we had taken out to cut the wind and sun, get the dishes done, and then finally we get around to packing our new tent. The tent works brilliantly, but the packing process still needs to be refined. The tent turned out larger than we envisioned it when we started the project and it currently makes packing 'interesting'. I also need to change the bed frame to slim it down a bit which will help with the packing. Heine and Mandy called it "Mobile Homes - Part 1" 😊

Eventually I convince it all to get into the truck and we are on our way. We didn't make a long drive of it, but headed down to Mpayathutlwa pan, where Heine and I went around it – Bruce headed straight



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for Mabua #1. On the way around Mpayathutlwa Pan, we ran into Noel Pipkin and Richard Howell and have a chat while looking at some large vultures at the watering hole. We then mosey up to Mabua #1 where Bruce was waiting with his camera to snap a few pics of us arriving.

He was already setup with a stunning view of the pan, Heine made space for us in the sand as I need to put pegs in and we left space for Mike who we assumed was getting close. This time we did not put out the fly for the tent, so that we could test the "view the stars" function. The roof of the tent is all gauze you see! ☺

We tried several times to reach Mike, and eventually, we got hold of him. He tried to pull our leg a bit by saying he was at Khiding Pan, and where the hell were we, but a few minutes later we see him turn onto the Mabua pan loop at Campsite #4 and make his way around.

Lots of hugs and greetings to finally see them there! He then tells us he had some more drama with a fuel pipe breaking just 7 kms before the gate! Running repairs made, and they made it here. He was a little stressed, but nothing that a few captains couldn't sort out!



Mike and Estelle decided that we desperately needed to have a pizza shovel and so brought one for us! ☺ Sort of back fired as the corrugations made it a noisy thing in their car all the way up! ☺ Estelle also had hand painted each person a wine goblet (and in the case of Bruce a mug), with our names on it. Very creative is our Estelle! Thanks! They are very nice and they drink very nice as well! ☺

Margaret gets Estelle and Mike their trip table cloth (everyone got one), and then later we gave Mike his new T shirt "**Het is en Cruiser ding - jy sal nie verstaan nie!**" – which, in light of his adventures with his new cruiser, we thought was fitting! :)

Soon, Mike and Estelle are setup, and the rest of the afternoon goes quickly. It had been quite a warm day, and some serious tans were developing!

Starters are prepared (Crackers with a variety of cheeses, droe wors etc.) and we head to the edge of the hill to view the pan. There is no water in the watering hole, but we were making valiant efforts at restoring the water table.

The temp started to get a bit nippy, and with reports earlier in the day that Lion had been at the camp, and indeed, we had seen their footprints, we headed back to the campsite proper to build a fire and get things warmed up a bit. I had put my wind shields out in an arc around the available trees in the site, and this had a decided warming effect. The wind was not strong, but the persistence of it, and the chill was somewhat deflected by the nets.

Mike and Estelle put on a stunning Prawn braai with Calamari, which prompted discussion of what the anthropologists would make of the shells of prawns found in the Kalahari 1000's of years from now! (Don't worry, we burnt them – don't want to confuse future generations now do we?)

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The wine flowed, conversations, and silliness abounded, but after a while, everyone needed to go check their eyes for light leaks and the camp grew quiet.

Departed	:	10:26 (even more civilized)
Arrived	:	12:40
Distance	:	27.8 kms
Average Speed	:	12 kph
Moving Average:	:	16 kph
Max Speed	:	24 kph

Wednesday

The day dawned bright, chilly and calm. The day never really got away from the chill, and most of the day was spent with jackets etc on.

A relaxing day, with a few Gemsbok, Kudu and Red Hartebeest spotted on the pan. There wasn't much else moving. The Guinea fowl and the hornbills were quite tame, and we even had a yellow mongoose (George – since Alan was taken), pay us a tame visit. Should you hold out a finger – make sure it is holding something! (Right Elmarie? ☺)

All of the others went for a tour around the pan and various other tracks. Mike and Estelle also went to hunt down some pipe to try repair the leaking fuel line. They found some line (not ideal, but it would work – for a while) and then bumped into a mechanic who offered Mike help to fix it. Soon done, they are back to camp.

It was a quiet day, with no drama (yet) and soon thoughts turned to food! ☺

Starters were prepared by Elmarie and Mandy (the guys wimped out) and soon there was a variety of pate, cheese, meatballs (with hot chutney ☺).

Mike and Estelle were making ravioli filled with squash, the sauce a creamy, spicy chicken. Margaret and I were making Pasta Verde (Basil, Celery leaves and Parsley to provide the green) with a meatball invaded tomato sauce!

Yes, we both brought our pasta machines. Yes, we both made fresh pasta. Yes, it was good! All of it.

Filling our faces with lots and lots of food, wine, and more, we built up the fire very nicely. Mike did NOT want to take any wood back, so we obliged! We had also made some popcorn in a large frying pan, but not having the lid, the popcorn was sort of “catch me if you can” style! ☺

A small cape fox makes its appearance and gets quite nosey and tries to get at the food. Mike shoos it away, but it keeps coming back. It makes a turn at our truck, and a while later we see the mother as it was quite a bit larger. Nice.

Heine had not been feeling very well and after calming down his headache, headed for bed. Mike was also crashing and headed off. Bruce and Elmarie were not far behind. That left Estelle, Margaret and I sitting round a very nice and warm fire. Margaret mentions that she should perhaps think about putting away the food and doing the dishes tonight, and I am thinking about taking the shovel for a walk, when suddenly Estelle starts spluttering something about a four legged thing, like a donkey or something at our kitchen. She eventually gets out the word “lion” – jumping up we see a very large lioness licking out the popcorn pan.

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The spotlights are fired up, and soon it became very obvious that she was not alone. At least 3 more are spotted. We get Heine and Mandy out of bed, Estelle rushes off to get Mike up, and a minute or so later, realise that Bruce and Elmarie had not heard any of the commotion – so we went to get them up!

After wandering through the camp (between us and our vehicles), they moved off about 10 meters. But soon with the spots all trained on them, and the number of moving bodies having increased, they moved up the road to Khiding. Needless to say, everyone is now awake! But as they move off and only the eyes can be seen, the adrenaline wears off and sleepiness sets back in.

Heine and Mandy head back to bed, and Mike is also tuckered and heads back. Any thought of a walk to relieve yourself in the bush is now finished! Bruce and Elmarie take a short drive up the road to check out how many there are, and come back confirming that there are 3 females and 1 pre-mane male! They follow Bruce back to the corner and sort of wait there. A few minutes later they disappear, and nobody saw them go – so we have no idea of where they are!

Hmmmmm.

Carefully scanning with the lights, I get the stuff for our shower and come back to the fire. Shower water heating up, we keep scanning the area around us. Bruce suddenly notices a shadow moving right to left – we scan some more, but don't see any trace of them.

Bruce and Elmarie head to bed, our shower water is hot, and Estelle heads off to her vanity case, while Margaret and I head for our tent and our shower. Carefully scanning around, with one watching and the other showering, we get our washup done and close down for the night.

We don't hear them at all, although we did hear the Cape Foxes moving around and a little later some more jackal noises.

An exciting last evening, and a lot of happiness that we had seen the lion. Everyone knows there is a distinct possibility that they can and will come through your camp, but complacency kicks in and one starts to forget about this. Call of Nature duties should be done during the day and caution needs to be taken at night. Not all the critters in the bush are friendly!

No travel stats, didn't move! 😊

Thursday

The morning dawns clear and bright and warmer than the day before. Coffees, breakfast and general packing up as we are heading back towards Cullinan Guest Farm today. Not a long trip by any means, but we still want to be moving by around 10am.

The Lions are spotted on the pan, and Bruce and Elmarie head off to go take pictures. They get quite close to them and get some nice pictures. They also confirm that the shadows we saw moving the night before were in fact the lions heading down the track to the watering hole loop.

We are all packed up by 9am, and grab our chairs to go join the others to reminisce about the trip and the last evening. Estelle is taking a bit of ribbing about the "donkey" she spotted – all in good fun of course.

Eventually, everyone gets up to finish putting away chairs, and then there is a muttering coming from the vanity case. One of the hinges has broken and it won't close properly. Well, a bunch of extra hands, a hunchback and some graft and the situation is soon sorted. An extra strap is put around the offending door to make sure it stays there for the duration of the trip home.

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Just after 10am, we are all ready to rock and we head for the gate. Bruce is leading and we are bringing up the rear. It does not take long and by 11am we are at the gate. Not sure what the rush was, but here we are.

Formalities at the gate over, Mike and Bruce are soon on the way, with Heine shortly after. We hit the facilities and then get going as well. Heine soon passes Bruce and the 40kms of deep sand take about an hour. We catch up with Bruce and with Heine riding shotgun on Mike, we stay behind to double up.

Along the way we heard Heine make a comment that a cheetah had run across the road, left to right in front of them. Margaret starts scanning the side carefully, as on many trips we had seen cheetah along the cut lines. Sure enough, a little bit later and she spots it. We reverse and manage to get exactly ONE picture before it moves off and disappears. But we did get the picture!

At the end of the sand, we let Bruce get ahead as the road can be quite dusty. The 70 kms to Tsabong takes another hour and by 13:40 are at the border going through the formalities. Once through on the SA side, it is Bruce's turn to some running repairs. One of the back mudflaps has come loose and needs removing to prevent further damage. Quickly done and by 14:35 are back at Cullinan Guest Farm.

This time, Bruce and Elmarie as well as Heine and Mandy are going to camp as planned. We get our stuff moved into our room (one bag) and then go to the campsite to kuier for an hour or two. Mike and Estelle soon join in and an afternoon of good company and water table enhancement commences. Shortly before 5, Margaret and I head back to our room to shower (and soak in a tub) and to prepare for dinner. At the main house, we spot the Bat Eared fox that Bennie had mentioned to us earlier. There appears to be something wrong with it, a lot of goop coming out of its eyes and it kept turning in circles all the time. Had we been closer to our vet – who knows a thing or two about wildlife veterinary work – we might have captured it and had it inspected and treated if possible. But, with the nearest vet 180 kms away, well, I suspect it will be quietly put out of its misery once we have left.

Close on 18:30 we head into the main house to meet the others, they are not there yet, so we spend 30 minutes with Marda and Bennie discussing family, and getting to know each other better. They are wonderful people, willing to go out of their way to help you. They offer to call the butcher in town (Oryx Wildvleis) to make sure he was open as we wanted to stop there and at Black Angus to get some Kalahari beef! (yummy)

The others soon arrive and the dinner begins. A wonderful thick cream of mushroom with Biltong shavings and home made bread sticks for starter, followed by Pumpkin Fritters, Boere Boontjies, Roasted Lamb Bits, Rice, Broccoli salad and gravy. Delicious!

Desert was Lemon cupcakes with icecream and cream, drizzled with a sweet lemon sauce. Double icecream for Heine. ☺

Coffee and after dinner chat, and soon (before 9) everyone is agreeing with Heine that it is TTFO and we head for our beds. We were asleep before 9 and slept right through to 06h30 the next morning. Apparently during the night, Marda accidentally set off the alarm, but we didn't hear a thing!

Departed	:	10:11
Arrived	:	14:35
Distance	:	183 kms
Average Speed	:	42 kph
Moving Average:		53 kph
Max Speed	:	93 kph

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Friday

Up at 06:30, shower and coffee. Spent a few minutes updating this missive, but that came to a halt when the laptop went into hibernate as the battery was flat. Put it on charge and headed in for breakfast.

We poured ourselves some coffee and were chatting to Marda when Estelle asked if Mike could please borrow some more of the vulcanizing tape. Another petrol leak had developed in the temporary fix. Mike pinched off the back tank, wound lots of tape around the other side, and hoped it would hold until he got to Kuruman to get it repaired.

Bennie tells Mike that he will call his own mechanic in Kuruman and “ask him” to repair Mike’s truck. An offer gratefully accepted by Mike!

Once again, a wonderful spread of food lays before us, and we all tuck in. During breakfast the fox is spotted in the garden and Bennie goes out to take a look at it. He suspects that it has rabies and will deal with it later. (as we suspected) – He has a massive herd of cattle, and wildlife on his farm.

Soon however, it is time to depart, and after saying our good-byes (which take longer each time! ☺), we all get in our various chariots. We had been planning to run ahead so we could do our shopping, however, Bruce was itchy to go, and he left immediately. Heine followed and they were quickly a good couple of kms down the road. We got Mike hooked up to the vanity case, and at 09:07 got moving (after another round of good-byes! ☺)

We got up to around 80 - 90 kph and made short work of the 90 kms of gravel to Blackrock. The last 20 kms had been graded, so it was not a bad run at all. At Blackrock, Mike and I caught up with Bruce and Heine and we pulled over to pump tyres (they had been at 0.8 front and 1.7 rears) back to 1.8 front and 3.6 rears. Bruce and Mike headed into Blackrock itself to fuel and pump, and Heine said his goodbyes as they were going to run quicker than we would with the trailers. I passed Bruce and Mike to gain some time for shopping, but that was negated by a stop and go just before Kuruman.

We filled with fuel at the Total and headed for Oryx Butchery. Bruce in the meantime, after filling, headed out slowly for home with the idea that we would catch him. Mike turned to left at the Total to a garage called “Dup’s repairs” – who apparently is highly recommended by all the farmers in the area to do reliable repairs. A permanent and correct repair was quickly done.

At the Oryx butchery, we picked up a leg of Springbok, a Loin of Impala, a fillet of Gemsbok and a fillet of Kudu. We also found out he delivers to JHB at least twice a month and will happily take orders for delivery. He also makes a lot of biltong and droewors, however, he does use MSG (Aromat) – which is fine for many, but I’m allergic to it.

We move off to Black Angus, which is a very nice butchery right beside the Toyota and Caltex garage on the west side of town. A leg of Lamb, rump steaks, fillets and some interesting stuff made its way into our freezer! Prices are same as in JHB, but the taste, the taste! ☺

We head back to see if Mike and Estelle are done, and as we pull up, the rig is being pulled out onto the road. Around 12h45 we start rolling and head out of town.

The kilometres rolled by and by 15:00 we were in Sannieshof. We wanted to stop for some chomp at Tootsies but Mike and Estelle were heading to Bakgatla in Pilansberg to spend another two days camping and were still 260kms out. They wanted to push on, and since the cruiser was now working

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fine, except for one moment when the temp climbed and then settled down again, we said our goodbyes and they headed onwards.

We had a burger and chips (ok, not great, but ok), and a coffee and 30 minutes later we were also on our way. A police roadblock a few kms up the road, but no other issues.

We pulled up at the gate at home at 19:25 to be greeted by an excited Shiraz (10 month old, short hair border collie cross) and a few indifferent and offended kitties. But all was forgiven short order and purrs commenced.

We never did catch up with Bruce, who arrived home at 18:45, Mike was still 6kms from the gate when we SMS'd and Heine was also about 30 minutes from home. We let Marda know we had arrived (she asked us to) and we hit the showers.

It was a good trip, despite some drama for Mike. The objective was to have an easy trip, lots of time to chill and relax.

Will we do it again? Yup – this was the second time and I'll do something very similar again. Will we stop at Cullinan Guest Farm third time? Most definitely!

Departed	:	09:07
Arrived	:	19:25
Distance	:	687 kms
Average Speed	:	66 kph
Moving Average:		85 kph
Max Speed	:	124 kph

Fuel Consumption (Kuruman to Kuruman): 5.8kpl – with the exception of the tar to Blackrock and the short bit to Tsabong – the rest all in 4x4 and 80 kms of heavy sand. Cannot compare to 2 years ago as then we filled up only at home.

Fuel Consumption (Kuruman to Home) 7.3

Total distance travelled was 1793 kms : Litres diesel used - 288.64 : Cost - R3,881.01

Accommodation, including all meals at Cullinan Guest Farm & 5 nights 6 days in Mabuasehube : R2040

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The Tent

During this missive you may have noted that I mentioned a tent. Several years ago, we began discussing the idea of making a tent that could pull out of the side of the truck, with a double bed to go with it. Well, in January of 2012, we started the construction of the new canopy to accommodate that. Earlier this year, we finally got around to starting the tent. I had a rubberized base made up, and got hold of the makers of ripstop canvas in Alrode. Margaret had already acquired an industrial sewing machine (George) Harrison, and had become quite adept at making Chef's knife bags with it.



Margaret made the roof, doors, windows and various other panels as well as the flysheet which covers the whole thing. Then assembly started, and only then did we start to realize how big this thing was. The design was a 'tip out at the top' which gives a lot of room in the tent, and we only later realized we could have made the base a little smaller. With the walls moving away from you instead of into you, we did not need to have it quite as large.

Then of course, with my penchant for over engineering things, I made the bed frame too thick. All told, when this is packed into the side of the vehicle it looks like an impossible task. And it almost is. We managed, but it takes 10 minutes too long to pack up. We can get it setup in about 10 minutes. The packing up takes about 20 minutes. Too long. We'll get the setup down to under 10, and the pack up has to also get to less than 10 minutes – without breaking a sweat! 😊

The remedy? Well, first, I am going to rebuild the bed frame, so that it is not so heavy duty. Doesn't need to be. I can also move it 20mm further into the vehicle, which combined with dropping the material from 50mm to 25mm, will give us 45mm more packing space for the tent. That alone will make it fit.

After that we will analyse and decide if we need to take a bit out of this tent (make it a bit thinner at the far end, and a bit shorter too, which will also make it easier to pack. If that is needed, we will do it. If that is needed, and modifying it doesn't work, then we will use the various bits of this one, and re-engineer them into the slightly smaller version. But, that is in the future.

For now, we have a tent that does what we want it to do, albeit a bit on the large side. We have a double bed which is elevated. We have good ventilation, and windows that let us view out onto whatever vista we happen to be parked at. We have space to sit inside to eat or get out of the elements should they be adverse.

And yes, it might be Mobile Homes : Part 2 😊