

Lesotho – May 2013

[this report is aimed at the 4x4 community but is being distributed wider. If not interested, skip the bits about road conditions, new bridges and T4A]

We entered Lesotho at Tele Bridge, near Barkly East, in our Toyota Raider double cab 4x4 6-cylinder petrol and took the A4 to Alwynskop and then on to Mount



Moroosi. We camped at the Moroosi chalets. Facilities are basic but adequate with solar-heated showers. There are rondavels and camping available. Camping cost R75 pppn. For bookings and information contact Max +266 6363 3416.

At Mount Moroosi, by chance and good luck, we met Ray Chaplin who is doing a river-boarding trip from the source of the Orange to the mouth. His backup team of Douw Steyn and Jacques Lightfoot arrived shortly after us. We had a braai together that evening. The next day we helped the team take promotional photos of Ray in and out of the water. Great fun. In return, they sponsored our hotel B&B in Moyeni that night. The next day the support crew left very early and we dropped Ray where he had to continue his unbroken trip. There are some more pictures here: <http://goo.gl/jXJFJ> and on Ray's own page.



Tele Bridge to Qacha's Nek is all-tar in pretty good condition. There are a few shallow potholes (compared with MPU) although some of the speed bumps through the villages are vicious.

We drove on to Christ the King Mission near Sesake. There are some magnificent gorges that we visited in the afternoon and again at sunrise. We camped in the garden of the local priest (for a donation).



In the morning I also visited the local primary school to donate a box of paper and ballpoint pens. The teachers and pupils gave me a warm welcome.

From there we planned to head towards Sehlabathebe National Park, first making a detour to explore a new road being built by the Chinese. It is from Sesake towards Semonkong. The new tar is being laid and two grand bridges have been



built crossing the Senqu and Senqunyane Rivers. We did not go the whole way but a taxi driver told me the road is good all the way to Semonkong. No maps that I know of have this road and it is not in the latest T4A release. From there we know the road goes though to Maseru with a good surface.

When we got near Qacha's Nek, an engine warning light came on so after some debate we decided to head for a Toyota garage in Matatiele although TZJ was running normally. When I switched on after passport control, the light had gone off and stayed off for the rest of the trip.



Anyway, rather than do a U-turn at passport control we drove to Matatiele and spent the night in a very good B&B – Resthaven Guesthouse. Philip and Elrita Rawlins (info@resthaven.co.za) made us most comfortable and helped us with planning the remainder of our trip. Matatiele surprised me in being a clean and prosperous town with a street full of B&Bs and most amenities



that one would need. It would be a good base for exploring the southern 'Berg and that part of the Eastern Cape. We hope to go back.

We got lots of weather reports and it seemed that rain and snow were on their way in Lesotho. There were ominous lenticular clouds at dawn. Anyway, we set off and crossed into Lesotho again at Qacha's Nek. After the first few km of good tar road we took the turnoff to Sehlathebe National Park. T4A told us it was just a 'track'. We found a well-made all-weather road all the way to the gate and beyond northwards. There were even teams doing maintenance on the road. The



road is good enough for a Tazz or Polo driving slowly. The road in the park needs a bakkie or 4x4. We did the trip from Qacha's Nek to the entrance gate in less than four hours, including a stop at a suspension bridge over the Senqu, which is no longer in use. The suspension bridge, well worth a visit, has been replaced by a low-level causeway.

The weather was pretty miserable with low cloud and occasional showers so we opted to stay in the Lodge in the Park. It is a self-catering place with six bedrooms, three bathrooms and a large lounge/dining room. We had it to ourselves. The cost was R150 pppn with R10 extra for a lovely fire in the middle of the lounge. There is also camping possible with very few facilities.

From the Park we took the road to Sehong Hong over the spectacular Matebeng Pass. This took us about four hours on a good track. 4x4 is not necessary in dry conditions.



From Sehong Hong we took the track to Mokhotlong, intending to exit at Sani Pass. This is a deeply rutted potholed track but 4x4 is not necessary in dry conditions. We found a camping spot away from villages and inquisitive people next to the Linakeng River. There were other fireplaces dotted around so it looks

like a regular stopping point.

The next day we could not get over the Menoaneng Pass (3050m) as a result of



deep snow and ice on the road. The tyres could not get a grip in the frozen snow. At 2880m we turned around and headed down the pass again.

We took the track to Thaba-Tseka and on to Katse Dam. The Chinese are well advanced with a new bridge at Koma-Koma (Mohlanapeng) to replace a low-level causeway. Earthworks are nearly completed and holes are being dug for foundations. A big quarry for crushed stone has been opened up and a crusher is operational. It will not be long before this bridge is completed and then the road on either side will probably be improved.



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Thaba-Tseka to Katse was the worst stretch of road we encountered. It is badly eroded with deep potholes making for slow progress. It is also not necessarily 4x4 territory in dry weather. Interestingly, I read at the Katse Dam Information Center that one of the social/community upliftment responsibilities of the Lesotho Highlands Water Authority was the re-building and re-surfacing of this stretch of road (along with a bypass around Maseru). If this ever happened, there is no evidence left.

At Katse we found (free) camping with basic amenities in the grounds of the Lesotho Highlands Water Commission interpretive centre.



The next day we exited Lesotho at Butha-Buthe (Caledonspoort) after a most interesting holiday in Lesotho. The snowplough had been out and the sides of the tarred road were deep in snow over the Mafika-Lisiu Pass (3090m).

The southern part of Lesotho seems less visited by holidaymakers although the scenery is stunning. I can certainly recommend a visit.



I still don't know why that engine-warning light came on when it did!

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