

Between one thing and another we thought we would never get away, what with the snow ice and gales and Maud not feeling too great. For sure we could not travel to London by car because of roads being blocked in Scotland and the north of England; fortunately Aldergrove, which had been closed by snow for a time, was operating again, so we took a Senior Citizens return ticket on the Shuttle to London and with the help of Selective Travel got a special rate at the Regent Palace for Thursday night 26/1/84 (useful to know-£19 instead of £35 for a double room). The room had a sink and facilities for making tea or coffee, but no bathroom; quite comfortable and being close to Piccadilly tube station was on direct line to Heathrow (the hotel, not the room!). Up at 6.30am on the 27th and at Heathrow by 8.45-in good time to transfer our luggage from Terminal 1 to 2 for the flight to Copenhagen by Scandinavian Airways at 11.25. We were surprised that the flying time was only an hour and a half but because of the time difference it was 2pm before we arrived. After we had settled into the room at the Globetrotter Hotel provide by the Airline we took the local bus into the centre of town. There was a biting wind and some snow about but we managed a pleasant walk round the main shopping precincts, Maud inspecting (mainly) the fashions and fur coats, of which latter there a great many; but even if the prices had been right we couldn't possibly take one to Africa-could we?! The cold made us hungry so we selected one of the many pizza cafes and enjoyed one of cheese shrimps and mussels, done with a delightful herb garnish. We thought Copenhagen would be worth another visit in a better season-it's waterways are very attractive; but generally we found prices high. The pizza was only the start of our journey's feasting; at breakfast at the hotel there was raw fish and cheese besides the normal choices; I found the raw fish excellent. Then once on the plane to Johannesburg Scandinavian Airlines gave us hardly any rest from wining and dining from departure at 10am till arrival at Jan Smuts at midnight, which included an extra hour for time difference which was absorbed, thankfully, by a break at Nairobi. By far the best food and service we can remember. And no mishaps with the luggage except a plastic knob on the typewriter got broken. So to the hotel Jacaranda where the man on late duty was a Yorkshireman from Dewsbury Road Leeds! But he knew nothing of our booking and had to search for a spare room. At last to bed.

29/1/84 Got up quite early by mistake-Maud had forgotten to alter her watch for the time difference. In daylight the Jacaranda looked a little fresher-new carpeting and decoration. We sat by the roof-top pool for about two hours after breakfast and allowed the sun and breeze to make our skins quite tender-we should have known better but of course it was so pleasant to relax in the sun, after all the cold. So after that we read the Sunday newspapers out of reach of the sun and apart from a stroll up to Hillbrow and an afternoon nap, did little. The hotel seems full, with a lot of younger people enjoying themselves round the pool making music(?) and having a brai. The newspapers report that over the past two years S A has had 23% inflation and this is reflected in the price of property (comparable houses now seem dearer at present exchange rates than in the U K whereas they used to be cheaper) and in food and clothing prices; strangely petrol is slightly cheaper at 35p a litre, and of course drink is still reasonable (brandy £4.25 a bottle

Pay seems to have risen; routine jobs get about R12000pa while executives run R30000 upwards. Because of recession there are supposed to be fewer openings but there seem just as many adverts for staff in the papers. Notwithstanding the lower price for gold and the effect of drought on agriculture S A still has a surplus on balance of payments. I mentioned that we had a stroll to Hillbrow; in fact we went over the hill to Joubert Park and the railway station; possibly most of the whites go out of town on Sunday but anyway it did seem that the blacks had taken over. All dressed neatly, some elegantly, and the children cute in spottish attire. Many of the women were in their church "uniform"-usually blue and white robes; near the station there were open air gospel meetings. As a white man in shorts I was a little conspicuous! Only round the open air chess board in Joubert Park were there mixed races. Our walk made us a little thirsty but there were no oases-like Belfast the bars are shut on Sundays. After the evening meal in the hotel we watched TV and were pleased to find that there is an English Programme available all through now.

30/1/84 Acting on advice from the airways stewardess our first call on Monday morning was to the SAS office in the Carlton Centre to make a provisional reservation for the return flight-leaving this at the latest possible date of 8/4/84. Not that we had any ideas yet how we would fill the time but at least we were sure of getting back coming up to Easter. At the Centre we also visited the Tourist Board, where the man could do nothing to confirm our Natal Parks Board bookings-just go ahead, he said, there is always difficulty in getting them on the phone! A surprising admission by one public body about another, but only too true, as we discovered when we tried to phone ourselves. Enjoyed browsing round the Carlton Centre shops especially the numerous African craft ones. Shared one ham roll between us for lunch to give our tummies a chance to recover from over-eating; then back to Hillbrow by taxi. In the evening saw the preview showing of Agatha Christie's "The Hollow" at the Andre Hugenet theatre. Small audience but excellent production-enjoyed it immensely.

31/1/84 Woken by a call from de Silva at Gaborone to say that he had been unable to obtain funding from UN or CFTC for the post he had mentioned last year as a possibility. The Department is in a mess! Things generally are not too good-this is the third successive drought year. Having made enquiries about car hire and weighed up the relative stress we decided that we would travel to Durban by train and as the overnight sleeper was full this meant the day train on Wednesday. So we called at the station to collect the ticket, spent a long time getting money at Standard Bank, again shared a ham roll for lunch in the Sterling Hotel bar, and walked all the way back to Hillbrow (equivalent I think to Shaftesbury Square to Balmoral). Maud then rested (she is still a bit shaky) while I tried the local baths for a swim, but they are ancient and not a patch on Castlereagh. After dinner we packed in readiness for our 8am train in the morning, then saw the evening news on TV. Mostly about cyclone "Bomoina" which has travelled in from the Indian ocean across Maputo to deluge the country from Kruger Park in the north through Swaziland to Zululand. The Natal Parks which we hope to visit have all been cut off by the floods! Roads, bridges and native dwellings have all suffered, some being washed away, and lives have been lost. Recorded rainfalls were Piggs Peak 840mm, Mbabane 628mm & Mananga 251



We thought of the young Dane who sat with us on the plane who, having already done a twelve month round the world trip by air, working as a carpenter at some of his stopovers to pay his way, was now going to work for some friends who are running a Norwegian Evangelical Church mission in southern Swaziland. Having painted glowing pictures for him of the country we wondered how he reacted to the cyclone! Also Ray and Elisabeth were to be motoring down from Transvaal to Durban along that route about now; there was a TV picture of a vehicle similar to theirs caught in the floods but we're hopeful it wasn't. Other news concerned the imminent withdrawal of S A troops from Angola and the visit of Mugabe to London (the press here used the occasion to highlight the killings by Mugabe's troops in Matabeleland) During the day we had in fact enquired from S A Railways about the possibility of a trip to Bulawayo by train or coach. The official was quite scathing about the decline in the quality of tourist and other facilities since independence (e.g. they may say they have made a seat booking on the train for you but haven't - and they put anyone on i.e. blacks). But if we insisted on going (he implied) we should make Harare our base. Also in the news is that Trevor Huddleston is visiting the OAU states and, not surprisingly, says that he has received confirmation from all of them that S A is pursuing a policy of destabilisation against all its neighbours. Apart from Botswana, which I suspect is a rather reluctant member of OAU, it seems unlikely that S A intervention is necessary to create instability in the other neighbours. The day has been overcast and there was some rain during Monday night so the temperature is too oppressive; it suits us really.

1/2/84 Got up at 6am and were rudely awakened by a sour-faced Afrikan taxi-driver at 7.20am when he called to take us to the station. We would have been quite happy to have remained somnolent for a while but he quickly roused our tempers; first he let me put all the luggage in the boot myself then came to inspect it and said "it wasn't right at all" and took it all out again and re-packed it himself! It didn't make any difference to the luggage but presumably satisfied his ego. Anyway his boot lid did not fasten - it was broken. Then when we said we wanted to be delivered to Platform 16 at the station (having been taken there yesterday by another driver) he refused and said he could only take us to the main hall (from where we would have to carry the luggage down to the platform). His excuse was that if he drove down to the platform he might get stuck and not get out for a while - he would do it if we paid him another R12! (the fare was normally R4!). So we ceased speaking to him and when we got to the station found, as we suspected, that his excuse was bogus. Nevertheless we had a tussle carrying the luggage to the platform and felt like reporting the driver to the Tourist Board as an example of how not to make friends. It seems to me something in the Boer nature that produces an enormous chip on the shoulder at times, yet we have often been kindly treated by them. Anyway we were in good time for the train and settled down in compartment 4A (all seats are nominated by a list on the platform board) with a young couple travelling to Glencoe near Ladysmith. They were Afrikaans and were obviously happier speaking their language but used English to be friendly. They were to visit their parents in Glencoe - the young man had time off work because of injury in a motor-bike accident when both of them were hurt.

His byke is 1000cc and while not particularly tall he is built to match-square-shouldered and thick torso and limbs-typical Boer. The train left on time at 8am but work on the lines delayed it so that it was over an hour late at Durban, not arriving till after ten pm. But at least we were able to relax, enjoying the passing scene through Heidelberg, Balfour, Standerton, Volksrust, Newcastle, Glencoe (where the young couple departed), Ladysmith, Estcourt, Mooi River, and Pietermaritzburg. There were no floods until Newcastle but from there to the Tugela River large areas had been inundated and the rivers were torrents. We ate sparingly during the journey—two Cornish Pasties and a sandwich each from the restaurant car, from which the service to the compartment was excellent. A small fold away table enabled me to do some of the typing of this diary—swaying of the train caused some of the errors! As we approached Durban we both felt a bit weary and were glad when at last the train rolled into the new concrete monstrosity of a station. To get a taxi we had to manoeuvre the luggage up an escalator—porterage seemed non-existent. But we were soon at the Lonsdale Hotel at which we had booked for five nights dinner bed and breakfast on an out of season special offer. On arrival we were to be given a complimentary free drink but when we asked room service for a brandy and a whiskey the waiter knew nothing of the arrangement—however reception promised to see to it so we didn't pay the waiter. However after a short while he again appeared, this time with two bottles of wine which were the complimentary drink—so we had to pay him for the spirits! We retired for the night weary but slightly happy, once the air-conditioner had been sealed off with cardboard and adhesive tape to stop the cold air blowing across the beds (the system wasn't functioning properly).

2/2/84 Checked the car hire companies to make sure that the offer of a Corolla from Hertz was the best available; it was R280 pm and 14c per km after the first 1000. The main news of the day in the papers and on TV was the flood catastrophe in northern Natal; in particular the Game Reserves we intended to visit were isolated and many bridges, including a modern concrete one of several spans between Pongola and Mkuzi had been swept away. The chances of us getting to them seem remote, apart from the first one—Giant's Castle which is in the Drakensburgs away from the floods. Tried phoning the Parks Board again but no luck. Will have to call at the office in Pietermaritzburg on Monday on the way to Giant's Castle. We rested quite a bit during the day, explored the hotel, which is comfortable, and a cut above the Palmerston, which we had originally thought of, and in the evening saw "Never say never again" at the cinema. It was a shock to see that Sean Connery is nearly our vintage. Phoned the Evens to see was there any message from Ray and Elisabeth, but none.

3/2/84 The clouds and rain which hovered around yesterday cleared gradually. We took a bus to the Indian market—a covered market with two main sections, one for meat and seafood, the variety of which was a delight, and the other for jewelry and curio stalls. These latter had excellent displays of brasswork, carved ivory stone and wood. Between these two sections were stalls devoted to herbs and spices which scented the air and attracted connoisseurs of curry powders and exotic aromas. Later we visited the main Durban mosque and passed the City Hall—a replica of that of Belfast, though in a grey sandstone. After a toasted sandwich lunch in the hotel, we received a phone call from Ray and Elisabeth.



They intended checking in at our hotel, having just arrived in Durban. So later they called and we spent the rest of the day catching up with all the news. They had come down through Transvaal as planned, having been to Chobe and crossing the Botswana border at Martins Drift (only 100 kms of dirt from Palapye). But the best of the scenery in eastern Transvaal was lost in heavy rain (the edge of the Demoina cyclone). Instead of going into Swaziland via Pigg's Peak they were forced to use the Oshoek gate and after visiting Mbabane and Manzini had to go out the same way, travelling by an inland route to Ladysmith and Durban to avoid the flooded road down from Pongola. They found the greenery a distinct and welcome change from Botswana, where the drought has prevented growth. Both of them looked quite well, but they are a bit concerned about their trip home by sea from Capetown. The TFC shipping line has been having crew problems and if the boat sails at all it may go only as far as Genoa. The Aldham house is not sold; they are rather hoping it will be soon so that they can put the money into a property overseas—somewhere to spend the English winter; possibilities are Capetown or Spain—they do not fancy Durban because having worked there for eighteen months they regard the climate as unfavourable—Martin when a baby suffered there from what the doctor described as coastal asthma. After doing their holiday tour they have to return to Gaborone to sell the Landrover and will be staying with friends called Von Zyl in Tshekedi Rd; this will be in the first week in March.

4/2/84 Visited the Durban Botanical Gardens to test our newly hired Toyota Corolla from Hertz; seems OK. The gardens are a delight of lawns, trees, palms, bananas (some red), canas, many flowering shrubs, a pool full of lily pads and papyrus, with a fever tree in the middle full of weaver birds, and last but not least an orchid house. A tea house manned by volunteers (a very usual arrangement in S A public parks) provided us with tea and delicious pancake and syrup. Afternoon we did some sunbathing on the beach and I joined other bathers in a battle with the strong surf, being confined to a narrow stretch of water only about fifty yards wide supervised by a beach guard whose word, through the tannoy system, was law. Anyone straying was liable to prosecution! The reason for this control is not just the strength of the breakers—which was fierce enough, but the danger from sharks; the fixed bathing areas are protected by nets; even so the beach carries a warning notice that because of sharks bathers do so at their own risk. After the recent stormy seas bathing was prohibited until the nets had been checked. Over all it is not my choice of sea bathing or swimming: it's just a vigorous rough and tumble with the waves plus a scouring by the churned up sand! The strong sun burnt us a little more. Rested in the evening catching up with the weather news. Pictures of the flooded areas are still almost unbelievable and the death toll rises to over one hundred.

5/2/84 Ray and Elisabeth are visiting friends at Westville so we went to Mitchell Park where there is a miniature zoo—mainly exotic birds, wild fowl, and monkeys, but two large crocodile, two sizable monitor lizards, and some massive turtles, as well. This time the tea house was staffed by Indians—we had some rather nice homebrewed ginger beer. Had a lunchtime sandwich in our bedroom after which Maud rested while I tried sunbathing at the hotel pool (at which I had had a pre-lunch swim). Found the enclosed area too hot so Maud and I went again to take the breeze on

the beach (half a gale at times). Bathed again (am a glutton for punishment). Checked the holiday flats at the Impala in case we should be coming back through Durban-R12 per night and no minimum length of stay out of season. Later absorbed the Sunday Mercury—a Natal paper. Detailed reports on motoring conditions make it clear that roads to the northern Game Parks are cut; so we decide that tomorrow we will call at the Reservation office in Pietermaritzburg (on our way to Giant's Castle) to see what they advise. Other news in the papers is that gold has had a good week, and two research developments are reported; the first that an electro-chemical process can now extract gold more effectively than the cyanide leaching which has operated for nearly a hundred years and will be especially useful for low-grade ores; the second that laughing gas (nitrous oxide?) is useful in treating psychiatric disorders (possibly this news was late in reaching S.A.—Ann?). Apparently the main bridge that has been damaged on the northern route is that across the White Umfolozi river at Mtubatuba. Further north the Jozini (now called the Pongolaland) Dam, which suddenly is 87% full after being virtually empty, is giving concern; this is the first time it has really been tested since construction several years ago. So the sluice gates have been opened, though this in itself may be a risk to people living downstream. Packed our bags ready for departure tomorrow then had a late stroll.

6/2/84 Up at 6.30am and actually started breakfast before Ray and Elisabeth, who are early risers, appeared; discussed our various plans—they too are intending to call at the Parks Board to see if they can get into Loteni Reserve before going on to Umtata. Elisabeth would also like to re-visit Sani Pass—one of the border gates to Lesotho. She mentioned that their way to Chobe they had called at Shashe to see the Williams—he teaches woodwork in the school there and desperately needs another assistant. He himself is on OSAS terms but it is unlikely that new recruits would get quite as good arrangements. Incidentally Clifford Shaw who was head of the teaching service has now left. We left the garage behind the hotel in convoy and innocently we followed the landrover on the assumption that they were heading straight to Pietermaritzburg. Either Ray mistook the way or was calling somewhere else because it was soon clear that we had not struck the motorway. Possibly they were looking at where they had once lived or something; any way we lost them at a turning so retraced our tracks and eventually headed up the M3. Had a coffee stop at the Rob Roy hotel outside Hillcrest and Botha's Hill to see the valley of a thousand hills—a noted view over the majestic Zululand landscape. Magnificent as it was it proved to be only a token of what we were to see in the Drakensburg mountains. At the Natal Parks Board office in Queen Elizabeth Park near Pietermaritzburg we were relieved to find that they had in fact received my deposit and had confirmed the bookings—that was the good news; the bad was that none of the northern parks were yet accessible, though Hluhluwe might be opened about the 15th. However we could proceed to Giant's Castle for the three nights I had booked and they added another two at nearby Kamberg Reserve; but they could not provide anything for the weekend as the reserves were fully booked. However, so far so good, so in Pietermaritzburg we stocked up with foodstuffs and drink to take to Giant's Castle (cooking is done for you but you have to bring your own supplies). Back on the M3 as far as Mooi River (a small country town); then on to gravel road for 65kms to climb into the mountains to the reserve.



Some of it was a rather rough ride so it took over 1½ hours; it was now 4.30pm and after travelling all day in the heat we were tired. It was nice therefor to settle into the thatched hut no 8 allocated to us-twinbedded with bathroom-have a drink, and admire the scenery. Then our evening meal was cooked by the black staff in the communal kitchen and delivered and served in our hut. When the camp generator closed down at 9pm and all the lights went out we needed no further encouragement to settle down to sleep-the earliest since we started the holiday. Absolute peace in the hills.

7/2/84 Morning delightfully cloudless and clear. Visited the camp shop for the guide to the reserve. This explains something we found puzzling on our way up from Mooi River yesterday; the first 40 or so kms we travelled past land which was well tended but almost unpopulated, then suddenly the scene changed to rough country with the occasional patch of mealie and the road was alive with black pedestrians, some who had been shopping at local stores along the way, some who were returning from work in the fields and carrying their hoes etc. Along one stretch there were long crocodiles of school pupils, mainly older girls and youths, who had just finished for the day; all smartly dressed in uniform and looking well fed. We had wondered how so many could be sustained in such unpromising surroundings and even more what they would all find to do when grown up. Well according to the guidebook this area was a Bantu Reserve and presumably must get help from central government. The Game Reserve began in 1903 with 7000 hectares and is now 34000-all unpopulated except for the staff and a maximum of 59 visitors in the huts; so there are vast open spaces to be explored on marked footpaths and once away from the camp one might meet no-one for miles. Altitude ranges from 1500 metres to the maximum of 3280 metres on the escarpment bordering Lesotho. The reserve takes its name from the peak called Giant's Castle. Game is confined to eland and other deer and a few baboon but there is a variety of bird and plant life. Our first walk was up the Bushman River to where else-caves formerly occupied by Bushmen until as late as 1900. Numerous rock paintings have survived, some well preserved in colour and form. Surprised to learn that it was not until the mid 1800's that the Bushmen began to be ousted in this area-largely because they persisted in regarding the white man's cattle as wild creatures they could hunt-they had no sense of ownership. On the way back from the caves I had a dip in the river; to say it came from the mountains the water was not really cold, so I had another one after lunch.

8/2/84 The camp shop reported that the parks in northern Natal are still closed until further notice; even if they were not there would be difficulty in reaching them, the roads within the reserves would be in poor shape and goodness knows how the animals have fared. So that is that for the moment and we shall have to plan something else. Had a walk up the hills to Lammergeyer Hide (rather a stiff climb for us) but saw no eagles; a few eland and some baboon. Did the walk by the river in the afternoon and again saw eland. Today remained clear and hot whereas yesterday had turned cloudy and there was a thunderstorm at night.

9/2/84 We didn't sleep well and it's raining this morning! Everything just above camp level lost in cloud and it's cool. Mrs Goodey at the camp shop full of cheer(!)-only the Drakensburgs are getting rain while the mealie growing areas are gasping for a break in the drought and now it's too late to save the crop; they say that S A will be a net importer of maize this season, costing the country R5M in foreign exchange. Anyway we had been lucky with the weather at Giant's Castle so couldn't complain as we left for Kamberg Reserve about 42kms by road roughly south but still in the mountains. All the Bantu we passed were well wrapped against the cold. Reached Kamberg by 10.30 am in spite of rather rough gravel and dirt road, and took the rest of the day leisurely. Saw quite a lot of reedbuck or(?)blesbok and some wildebeest up on the hills. The sky cleared later but a breeze developed keeping the air cool. Glad to take shelter in the hut after tea. The news is that Richard Attenborough has been visiting SA with the idea of making a film about it and has seen Mrs Mandela, and that a Springbok team has been invited to the UK.

10/2/84 Sunny and clear this morning and much warmer. First stop after breakfast was to the camp shop and office; Kamberg is fully booked at the weekend so we have to move on tomorrow; the young lady at the office went to a lot of trouble over the radio to get us fixed up and eventually did so for Sat. and Sun. at Coleford Reserve which is on the Natal/Transkei border. There is talk of the northern reserves being open soon so we may yet go there! Visited the trout hatchery run by the Parks Board on the Mooi River just below the camp; very interesting; unfortunately they do not sell any fish to consume-only for stocking their own lakes and to some private dams. Leaving the fishery I nearly trod on a snake; however it saw me and slid off into a bush before I got a proper look, but Maud did and said it was about a yard long, an inch or so thick, and brownish. From there we were going to cross the river but the only crossing was at a weir over which the water was flowing quite strongly so we gave that up and walked along the river instead; very glad we did because there was plenty of interest-weaver birds nesting in bulrushes, a blue crane, a great fat toad, dragon flies of brilliant blues and reds, many wild flowers etc. Spent a lot of time trying to take photos. After lunch did another stretch of the river walk where there were madonna lilies, honeysuckle, and flowers which looked like red hot poker being visited by colourful butterflies; managed a photo of these. We both got a little sun burn. Had the river completely to ourselves. Evening meal in the hut, cooked, as usual by the black boy and all nicely done. The term "hut", by the way, is used by the parks board but in fact it is usually a substantial structure of concrete block, thatched, and attractively furnished. Ours is about 15 foot square and contains two beds, dining table and chairs, cupboards and wardrobe, a small fridge and a sink. There is a separate ablution block for communal baths and toilets-all spotlessly clean.



11/2/84 Left Kamberg shortly after 9am for Coleford, the sun already warm in a cloudless sky. Apart from perhaps 10km of tar at Himeville and Underberg the whole 100kms was gravel and dirt running along the Drakensburgs, up and down steep gradients twisting all the time; highest point was Carter's Nek 1981 metres. But the scenery was magnificent and most of it brilliant greens. Passed native settlements at Loteni, otherwise little habitation until Himeville and Underburg where mainly blacks. Much of the land en route seemed to belong to one ranching company. Coleford Reserve is remote-22kms from Underburg-in a wooded spot; quite pretty but we found the trees created trouble from flies etc. Snakes said to be present. Glad to rest after the journey in the afternoon and in the shade because it was unbearably hot in the sun. Checked the car log and discovered that the millimeter was showing 520 kms, and the trip meter 598 kms, while on the map I could only account for 420! Some thing wrong, especially if I run into a kilometre charge.

12/2/84 The day started cloudy and slightly damp but soon cleared-in time for the horse trail which I had booked for 9am. Maud did not fancy it but mounted on "Fox" I joined a handful of others to do a one hour ride through the game area, chaperoned by a black groom. Thank goodness the horses seemed to know exactly what they were supposed to do and any attempt by me to deviate Fox from his own way of going met with some resistance; probably he was laughing inwardly. Anyway it was very pleasant and we saw black wildebeest and blesbok. No sign of snakes which are said to be in the reserve; some are venomous-the puff adder, the cobra and the ringhals. After the ride we walked down to the Ingwangwana river where I had a dip, and again after lunch further up the river where the reserve has a stretch clear of rocks and not bad for swimming. A beetle about an inch long with speckled tortoise shell back tried to crawl into Maud's shoe. When we picked it up for inspection it played possum, but then when we left it alone it simply flew off! On the way back to the camp saw a black eagle and another we couldn't identify. A car with half a dozen blacks had broken down near the camp and after tea we went to see whether they had got the car going; they were struggling with a rear wheel for which the nut threads had worn. Gave them a hand and eventually they set off at dusk en route for Johannesburg over 600kms away, but with only two good tight nuts on the wheel. On a rough gravel road they would need plenty of luck! Managed to see a newspaper this weekend-Andropov is dead.

13/2/84 Chatted with the couple in the hut next door. He is Natal born and cannot remember any floods as severe as those this year. One of the Game Wardens in the camp shop told us that people were still marooned in Umfolozi reserve (where we would now have been); he said we were lucky not to have gone there a week earlier! Some of the visitors to that camp who had to get back for business reasons had been airlifted out by helicopter; others for whom time was not important had just remained in the camp. The warden also said that the chief problem in and out of the reserves was the destruction of bridges. So with the outlook still uncertain we decide to let the Parks office cancel the bookings for Charters Creek and Mkuzi starting 14th February (though with regret) and head for the south coast where we knew there was a reasonable chance of getting a holiday flat. First we bought a stinkwood pipe-rack and a head-scarf for Maud in the camp shop-these shops always seem to offer good quality at reasonable prices. Set off along 25kms of mountain dirt

road, in poor order, and with detours because of road works, before reaching tar en route for Swartberg and Kokstad. Not far from the camp the road passes for about two kms through Transkei but there are no formalities, just a roadside sign marking the borders. In this stretch was a thatched native village, an oasis of life in the vast open spaces around. Reached Kokstad, about 90 kms, before lunch. Not large, but spacious streets and leafy suburbs, with some very stylish residences; obviously a colonial foundation; several churches and two hotels, but it seemed to us that the blacks were now in greater preponderance, compared with whites, than even in Gaborone. Many of them dressed in style. Had a beer at the Balmoral(!) Hotel and a toasted sandwich at the Royal Hotel; this latter (according to the black waiter) had lost its drink licence following a fire. The way he put it was that it got burned, whether maliciously we couldn't find out. From Kokstad we had the choice of turning southwards into Transkei to Mount Frere and Umtata (the capital) but decided the extra mileage wasn't worth it - the scenery, which we have travelled through from the Cape side, is very similar to that of the Drakensburgs. So we headed down to Harding (again passing through a section of the Transkei on the way) and then to Isingolweni, a native area where the rolling hills are dotted with their round thatched huts and at the time of day we passed through the roads lined by children returning from school. At one point I stopped to take a photograph, which was fatal, because we were the immediate focus of attention for some girls; one, about eight years old, was more persistent than the others and began singing; she was delighted when we rewarded her with 20 cents and ran off laughing to her companions, pleased with her success. Beyond the village we left the N2 going to Port Shepstone and forked towards Port Edward, intending to cross the Transkei border there to the Wild Coast Holiday Inn with a view to staying the night. Well we did reach it but on discovering that they charged R79 for a double room for the privilege (meals extra) we settled for a coffee, and left without even trying the one-armed bandits in the casino. Tried an indifferent hotel in Port Edward which wanted R65 room only (down to R45 when we showed reluctance) and motored on to Margate for the Dumela holiday flats. By this time it was 5.30 and the office was closed but we found an even better flat in the CDS building not far away - still with direct access to the beach. Both exhausted after the long day so instead of preparing our own meal we went out to a restaurant and had very good kingklip and chips. Noticed the humidity a bit compared with up in the hills but not too bad. The flats are R15 per night minimum but would sleep up to eight people in which case it is R6 per person.

14/2/84 Stocked up with groceries then we both had a swim in the seawater pool constructed in the rocks; water quite warm compared with the sea, though this was not really cool, but had the usual Indian ocean breakers, making swimming uncomfortable. Our flat has a view over the beach from the balcony and we now prefer it to the one we had last year at Dumela. There is a short path from the garden on to the sand, where we spent the rest of the day, reading and acquiring a tan.

Talked to a Manchester man who had worked a long time in Rhodesia from where he had retired on pension to Natal. Could not get his money out of Rhodesia so could not buy a house here (in any case he said prices were too high). Instead he is renting a cottage on a market garden.