

South Africa 2011

Durban - Kruger NP - Karongwe Game Reserve

Leg details

Date February 26 - March 6, 2011
Leg Durban - Johannesburg - Kruger National Park - Karongwe Game Reserve

PDF



Leg map (click to enlarge in separate window)



Pre-History:

According to the Immigration Regulations, entry into South Africa will not be permitted on a one-way ticket. But because we will leave the country with our vehicle that is exactly what we have, a one-way ticket!

We decided that we will try to get an exemption of this rule and contacted the Consular Section of the South African High Commission in Canberra last year in September. Their reply was that once we have the documentary proof that the camper has been shipped (The Carnet) we should send a copy of it along with a request letter so that they can take this matter up with the relevant authorities.

So we sent the papers to them as soon as we had the exit stamp in it, which was at the end of January 2011.

Their answer was pretty frustrating:

"This Mission is unable to issue an Exemption Letter to waive the return ticket, as there is no Immigration Officer from the Department of Home Affairs in the Mission, who is authorized to issue an Exemption Letter."

Sorry, what???

So we asked back again and received this explanation:

"When you first made the inquiry in September, we had an Immigration Officer working in this Mission, who had the authority to waive the visa requirements depending on the circumstances.

Now that he has been transferred back to South Africa, we do not have an Immigration Officer who has the authority to waive the requirements anymore. Therefore, we are not in a position to issue you a letter to waive the return ticket."

So we went directly to the Department of Home Affairs in South Africa and asked them for the same thing.

Their reply did not help much either:

"Kindly be advised that we are unable to issue a letter of any sort. We ask that you please take this matter up with the office manager of the South African embassy in Australia again as they cannot rely on one person. If the immigration officer is not there, there must be someone in charge who can assist you accordingly."

We asked them to please get in contact with the Australian team and ask them to get organised, but they replied:

"Kindly be advised that we have contact the immigration officials at the OR Tambo port of entry (Johannesburg Airport) and it has been confirmed to us that you will need to have the return air tickets and that you will either have to apply for a visitor's visa for a waiver from the rule. Please note that the waiver application will have to be lodged with the consulate in accordance to their procedures.

However, as the Customer Service Centre we can only advise and have no jurisdiction over the embassy or consulate. Thus, you may just inform them of how you have been advised in our conversations."

We tried one last thing and wrote to the South African High Commission in Kuala Lumpur with the same request but never even got an answer

So we gave up.

Usually the boarding airline has the duty to check visas etc..

Since we did not want to take the risk of not being allowed to board the flight to Durban in Kuala Lumpur, we bought the cheapest one-way tickets out of Africa: Johannesburg - Maputo knowing that we will never use them

At the check-in in Kuala Lumpur Malaysian Airlines could not care less they did not ask for the return ticket at all, just gave us boarding passes and off we went.

But they were very friendly and let us board with our approx. 47 kg (not counting the jackets and pullovers we had tied around our waists) and at the end of the day this compensated for the Johannesburg - Maputo one-way tickets (would have been 60 US\$ per kg excess luggage

So we landed in Johannesburg's OR Tambo airport on Saturday, February 26, just before 6 AM.

We had all papers ready incl. the tickets but they did not check at all, just waved us through ok, so much for that

Next thing was checking in on the local flight to Durban strictly only 20 kg per person and 5 kg hand luggage hmmm but again they just processed the luggage and did not ask any questions.

Thanks guys, much appreciated!

The flight from Johannesburg to Durban seemed more like a taxi-ride ... everybody in shorts and T-shirts, very relaxed atmosphere and not a single seat available in the plane amazing for a Saturday!

In Durban we caught the shuttle into town and soon were in our hotel, right beside the entry of the harbour.



The view from our room was great, right on to the passage way where all ships have to go through when entering / exiting the harbour.

As the "Morning Courier" which has our OKA on board is due to arrive on Sunday evening we have plenty of time at our hand and study the ships going in and out on the internet and live.



The light of the control tower goes green when the ships are allowed in and red, when ships are exiting the harbour.

On Sunday we check the Internet again.

The "Morning Courier" is due at 6:30 PM, so we plan on having an early dinner.

When we head down to the hotel's restaurant we have to wait because the kitchen only opens after 6 PM.

Susi gets really nervous and checks the Internet every so often (www.marinetraffic.com).

But 6 PM goes by and no "Morning Courier" is moving she still is anchored outside the harbour (can be told by the speed indication on the tracking system).

After dinner we go back to the room no change ...

It still says 6:30 PM as ETA on the web-page but the light at the harbour's entry is on "red" and one ship after the other one is exiting the harbour.



Around 9 PM the light goes on green and on the Internet we can see that some of the ships start picking up speed and move towards the harbour but not the "Morning Courier"!

By 10 PM finally she also gets moving.

Ruedi tracks it on the Internet and Susi is ready to take pictures.



And there she comes!

Compared with the other ships that have been going in and out the ferry seems large.



On Monday morning we walk to the agent's office to deliver the original of the Carnet de Passage.

On our way we pass the "Morning Courier" but we cannot spot the OKA

The agent reckons that the OKA has not been unloaded yet and that it could take a while until this is done.

Also there is something wrong with the bill of lading: the measurements of the OKA are not on it.

She will have to get a new one done in Australia and have it faxed through.

What a nightmare with 10 hour time difference between Sydney and Durban!

She will call us once all is ready

So we head back to the hotel and wait luckily we can extend the room for another 2 days even though the hotel is fully booked with a congress!

On Tuesday we head over to the office again.

The papers have arrived from Sydney but the agent says something like "late delivery of documents" in particular the Carnet

So we learned something: next time we will be in the place where the OKA arrives at least 1 week prior to the arrival of the ferry and check all papers with the agent if they are ok!

We visit the office of the Automotive Association of South Africa to find out what insurances we have to have.

We are a bit surprised to find out that none are required and if one has one, the insurance will most probably not pay anyway - so why bother hmmm, nice attitude!

On Wednesday we have a problem: the hotel cannot be extended our stay anymore!

At least we can leave the luggage with them.

So we head to the agent and tell them that we have been kicked out of our hotel and that we need the OKA today.

This is not possible, because it required 3 stamps and for each stamp it takes one day ... Hakuna Matata no rush in South Africa this would mean that we only get the OKA on Friday or even on Monday (they don't work in customs over the weekend).

Now what?

We get all excited and tell them that we have to be at the most northern gate of the Kruger National Park on Saturday for our course.

One of the other agents gets involved and says that he will need a bit of time but that he has a plan.

Shortly after he comes back and asks us to take all papers with us and come with him to the harbour and customs.

He has experience from the World Cup and knows how to speed up things if required.

It is amazing to see him asking for particular people and run around between offices.

It takes him exactly 30 minutes per stamp and some 1 1/2 hours later we are on our way to pick up the OKA.



We also have to get permits to access the restricted area.

But then Alvin only has 2 security vests so only he and Ruedi can get into the customs area to fetch the OKA.

What a feeling to drive out of the harbour with our little house!

Back at the hotel we are allowed to stay on the parking and start getting organised.

It is a bit noisy but we sleep quite well in our own bed.



On Thursday morning Ruedi finishes the re-installation of the technical equipment which had been removed from the cab for the transfer (e.g. GPS, computer, solar panels etc.) and we are ready to head off.

As we are not yet familiar with the different roads classes we decide to pick the M13 towards Pietermaritzburg and not take the N3 toll-road.

There is heavy traffic on the road but the road quality is fine.

Soon after leaving the city boundaries of **Durban** behind us the road starts climbing.

We climb and climb and the country side changes from the lush almost jungle of the coast to green pastures and forests.

The M13 and the N3 toll-road merge again.

As we are expected for dinner in Pretoria we decide to speed things up a bit and take the toll-roads from now on.



We still climb and eventually pass the 1500 m mark.

Now the country gets flatter and is used for agriculture.



Later on we pass some areas with seem to be pastures but there are no animals on it.
The **Wagendrift Dam** overflows and looks great!



Nice area lots of agriculture again and pastures, some with cows on the horizon we can see the **Drakensberge**

At the first toll plaza we wonder, what toll class we are class 1 or class 2?

The lady decides that we are a car, as we are a non-commercial camper.

Thank you, that is class 1 and costs 32 ZAR instead of 74.s

South of **Ladysmith** Susi spots some animals that are definitely not cows, more similar to the deer she knows from Switzerland

Quickly the guide book is found and she learns that she has just seen her fist African wild animal: a Greater Kudu, a large antelope.

Fur lunch we have Chelsea buns.

They look like the Australian cinnamon scrolls but the spice they have must be either cardamom or coriander or something in that direction, yummy!

It is quite hot but we cannot read the thermometer because either the batteries are flat or it has died during the transportsomething for Ruedi's to-do-list.

At the next toll plaza we wonder what we will have to pay here.

We are classed as class 2 this time: small truck with 2 axles.

Hmmmm shame, "car" (class 1) was better.



We climb up to the **Van Reenen Pass** which offers some great views.

Then the OKA gets a bit if a wash



After **Harrismith** we see some large birds, a family of Ostriches with 2 chicks!

And this time Susi is fast enough with the camera!

Looks different to the Australian Emu, where the male takes care of the chicks. Here both share the job

The closer we get to Johannesburg the flatter the country side gets.

It is a mixture of agriculture and pastures and every so often a conglomeration of small huts probably only coloured people live there

We reach **Johannesburg** just for the evening rush hour but the routing software on the GPS seems to know that too and guides us beautifully around the CBD on the R23.

With just one slow section (where the N1 hits the R23) and after 615 km of driving we reach Jo and Margrit's place in Linwood Park, a suburb of **Pretoria**.

After a great dinner we chat a bit but soon the yawning starts luckily Jo and Margrit also get up early so they don't mind an early night at all.

After a quiet night in front of Jo and Margrit's house we are woken by bird songs, all new and interesting to hear.

Then we hear an invitation for breakfast hotel-style, with a soft-boiled egg, breads, home-made jams

We have so much to chat about and time flies!

Too soon we have to leave.

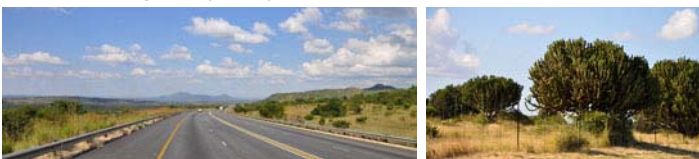
Dear Jo and Margrit:

Thanks for having us and for the great time!

After a bit of shopping we head north on the N1 again.

Up to **Modimolle** the country side is flat and dry.

Then we start driving into hilly country.



It turns greener and the bush grows up to the highway.

There are cacti in between the acacia.



Around **Haakdooring** we are passed by a group of Porsches, all with German plates

The haggling at the toll stations goes on.

But in the meantime Jo and Margrit told us that we have to mention that we have a single-wheel back-axle and that we have to insist on being taxed as a class one = car

and it actually works, which is very nice for our budget

After **Mokopane** the highway starts climbing again.



In **Polokwane** the highway is taken straight through the citycars, people walking, people selling stuff and the ever present minibuses that just stop where ever they see a chance for picking up a passenger
This is Africa!!!!



After Polokwane the road turns to a normal road with a wide emergency lane which is used by the slower traffic while the faster ones pass them on the regular lane or on the one of the oncoming traffic and cattle is driven over the road too

The valley is flat with a few hills every so often.

Then we cross the Tropic of Capricorn there is even a sign a few km later in a spot where the views are a bit better

We see that there are not too many petrol stations anymore before we have to leave the N1 and decide to fill up.

So far we have been using Engen and Shell and had been able to use our Australian credit cards.

This one is a Total and Susi gets a rejection on her Visa card.

Hmmmm could be the card, could be the company so Ruedi goes in and tries his luck.

As his card also gets rejected he pays cash.

Then he heads over to the ATM within the petrol station to withdraw some cash again.

After a while he comes back to the OKA a bit stressed but with a bundle of bank notes in his hand.

Susi gets upset and asks him to please be a bit more careful in the future with walking around with money in his hands.

Ruedi tell her that he had problems whit the ATM but that there had been a gentleman that helped him.



Shortly after passing **Louis Trichardt** we see a sign of a caravan.

So we stay at Clouds End Hotel & Caravan Park, a quiet little place and after a hot shower we are in bed and listen to the insects singing along in the bush.

Around midnight Susi wakes up because Ruedi is restless.

Then he tells her that he is afraid off that the "helpful gentleman" at the service station could have watched him entering his pin when withdrawing cash

We decide to get on the Sat phone and call the bank to enquire.

In the middle of the call the phone loses its reception of satellites and the line goes dead.

As the caravan park is in a narrow valley the chance of getting satellites back on the horizon is not good so Ruedi gives up and we will try again once we have reached the open country again.

Luckily Ruedi can find some sleep even though he is worried about the card.

On Saturday morning Susi get some washing done.

Coming from Australia where most caravan parks only supply cold water washing machines she knows that it pays to bring a bucket along to get the hot water from the shower

We hang the wet washing on the clothes line inside of the OKA and use the fan to get it dry.

At least this way the clothes are under no threat to be pinched off the clothes line.

Even though the T-shirts are old and battered they would not last long on an unguarded clothe line ... our old T-shirts are still much better than no T-shirt and some people out here really have nothing to spare.

(Note to the reader:

The "trick" with the hot water from the shower seems to have been unknown to the patrons of that caravan park.

The hot water must have loosened all the dirt from the last few hundred washes

Even though the clothes looked clean the clothes had a stale smell some of them had to be washed again

As we get ready to leave light rain sets in.

It is a shame because the drive over the pass north of Louis Trichardt would have been nice.

We see a cactus with pretty large white flowers a monkey balances himself over the road on the power line, holding himself with the tail on the top line and using two of the lower ones for walking great area!

The first game reserves appear with smart thatched and painted huts and high electrical fences.

We leave the hilly country and it is time to call the bank in Australia.

But when we get through we are told, that the Australian NAB bank is open from 9 AM to 4 PM Eastern time on Saturdays and Sundays and we have 9:10 AM South African time with a time difference of 10 hours we are too late

So we call the emergency number on the credit card but they can only help in medical or travel emergencies!

But at least the lady can give us the banks number for lost and stolen cards, which is different again to the one that is printed on the back of the debit card!!!

Anyway, we get through but the gentleman on the line insists that we must identify ourselves with the telephone banking login and password the what?????

We never do telephone banking!

Now what?

Well, all he can do is block the card.

We will then have to get in contact with our banker and have him sort things out.

That is fine for us.

Then he comes back and tells us that the card already was blocked due to fraudulent activities.

Aha!

So Ruedi was right!

For once we are glad that the bank acts so quickly in blocking debit and credit cards.

So all is fine for the moment.

We will have to use Susi's card to withdraw cash until we have contacted our banker, but that is no problem.

While Ruedi is busy talking to the bank Susi spots some strange birds in the trees, with large yellow bills.

The bird guide tells her that she sees Southern Yellow-Bills Hornbills

Sorry, no picture (at least not yet

Boabs or baobabs as they are called in Africa appear.

We reach the last toll plaza (Baobab Plaza) and have the usual argument regarding the class

But by now we have so many class 1 receipts from previous toll plazas that we just show them to the cashier.

This usually takes care of the classification we are learning but it is a steep learning curve!

Then we reach our turn-off towards Kruger and leave the N1 on the R525.

There seems to be more game here than further south.

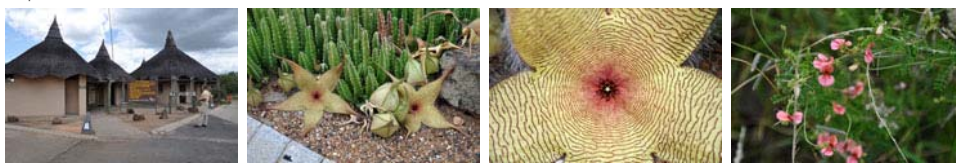
Plantations are fenced in with high fences, some of them electrical.

We pass through **Tshipise**, the place where we had wanted to stay the night a caravan park with hot springs maybe on the way out or next time

We pass small townships preparing for a party looking at one particular woman it looks like a wedding ...



Transport changes a bit donkey-powered wagons utes with many people in the back and the road gets worse and worse, the pot-holes larger and more frequent



We arrive at the **Pafuri Gate** just before lunch which gives us plenty of time to get organised.
We get a yearly pass to Kruger (Wild card) and get issued with a ticket / exit pass.



We meet some of the inhabitants of the gate house



This tree has some nasty thorns but it offers great protection for the birds-nest!

2 PM comes and goes and Susi gets nervous. Did she understand something wrong?
No, the instructions were clear: Be at Pafuri Gate and you will be picked up at 2 PM

At 2:30 PM we ask the person in the office at the gate how "African" EcoTours work.

Not at all African, they are always over-punctual!

We ask if he has their phone number so we can call the camp, but he doesn't.

Now we are worried and decide to drive to the camp.

We get the directions and actually find the camp on the Tracks4Africa map.

As instructed after some 9 km we leave the bitumen and head bush on a small track marked "No Entry".

It doesn't take long and a group of female Impalas with their young ones crosses our track.

It is the same system as with the kangaroos: Where there is one, there must be more still to come

But at least they don't have the same bad habit roos have, they don't dart out of the bush just a few meters in front of the vehicle!

A bit further down a male Impala stands on the track but runs away as we approach.

Then we disturb two males that are busily locking horns.

It must be a serious fight because as soon as we have passed they get back into fighting.

Then we spot some Zebras with their young.

Soon we reach the camp.

They don't really expect us

Ruedi gets worried that the training course might have been cancelled and we were not told.

The person in charge reckons that we should not worry and that he will find a solution.

He asks us to join them for lunch or at least for a cup of tea.

Then the lady from the office comes with the explanation: We were ordered to the wrong camp.

We should have gone to the Karongwe Game Reserve, some 250 km further south - a 5 hour drive!

They offer us accommodation for the night but we decide to hit the road and start travelling south.

As it is already 4 PM when we depart the lady recommends that we stop at the Punda Maria Camp, still inside of Kruger NP but just beside the Punda Maria Gate.

There are no camp facilities on the way to Karongwe and we are urged not to camp in the wild.



As we travel south we see an elephant on the road in front of us so we better stop.

We have no clue how close we can drive

The ute with locals behind us stops much further back than we did hmmm what does that mean?

Then a large bull gets onto the road a bit further away and looks towards us.

The female elephant right in front of us walks off the road and starts eating grass a bit away from the road.

As we are a bit pressed in time Ruedi starts rolling forward a bit but the bull does not appreciate that and waves with his ears, so we stop again.

On the other side of the road a car arrives and stops.

The bull looks at it, turns around and starts walking towards that car.

The car starts reversing but the bull still keeps walking towards it.

Then they turn around and start driving away.

Now the bull stops, waits a bit and then walks away into the bush.

We wait to see what the other car does.

They stop the car, turn around again and slowly come driving towards us.

Once they are past the area where the bull has disappeared they start driving with normal speed.

So we decide to start moving too and reach **Punda Maria Camp** with no further incidents.

We get a site and soon after we are in bed as we have to get up early next morning.

During the night Ruedi hears some roaring

On Sunday we get up a 5 AM and are ready to leave the camp as they open the gates at 5:30 AM.

We follow the instructions and drive through **Giyani**, towards **Tzaneen** and then **Letsitele**.



After passing Letsitele the road takes us through some hills into a valley that is surrounded by mountains.

At 9 AM we reach the road where the game reserve is on.

We look and look and look but cannot find the gate.

So we turn around and head back to the last place that we can find on the notes.

We call the camp and the lady tells us that the gate is right beside the Karongwe River and we should look for that.

We find it and arrive at the Spectra gate of the **Karongwe Game Reserve** at the same moment as the people from the camp arrive who have come to open the gate for us.

It is a short but rather washed out drive to the camp and we are glad that Ruedi has engaged the hubs because now he can use the 4WD low.

We reach the camp just in time for breakfast.

No liability for timeliness, integrity and correctness of this document is accepted.
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