

Thursday 1 February 2001

Cape Town, South Africa

Well, here I am. It's 10pm, and I'm knackered and also a bit drunk. Well, not drunk, just...mellow.

In the Ashanti Hostel in Cape Town – what a find! Beautiful colonial mansion with wooden floors, swimming pool, fabulous view of Table Mountain and very cheap bar (50p a glass of wine...hence the 'mellowness'!)

Couldn't ask for more – here I am, wearing shorts and sandal in February! Met a couple of nice guys – they are v. brown...I can't wait to be the same!

Also, what a small world...was strolling down to check out the city when I thought "I know that face" – Mark, who I first met in Chicago last year! First Chicago, then Cape Town, but never native England. Long may it continue.

Tomorrow will do a walking tour of the city centre, I think.

Friday 2 February 2001

It is just staggeringly beautiful here! I am sitting on a jetty that juts out from the V&A Waterfront, and if I look northwest, out to the sea, there is a variety of yachts and cruisers pottering about. Behind me, to the east, lies Table Mountain, and the city which foots it and dribbles on down to the seafront.

The V&A Waterfront is lovely – much like Chicago's Navy Pier but somehow less deliberately perky, and even though I'm not a big fan of these touristy bits, it's been done nicely. There's plenty of construction going on too, so parts of the city are evidently doing well.

And of course, it's MUCH cheaper – I'm about to have a pizza for lunch and a couple of glasses of wine, and that'll cost about £3...

And delicious it was too. Not to mention the ice-cream and coffee after it! Well I'm on holiday.

Also went to aquarium – amazing, and Mum would have adored the penguins.

Saturday 3 February 2001

Woke up to mild hangover – clubbing last night and bed at 2am. Even got myself invited to a local party in suburbs but declined in favour of more local treats.

Decided in afternoon to go up the mountain with Alex and Geoff. At the base, the man said “It’s freezing cold up there” but we must t have looked mournful, because then he asked where we were from and when we said England he said “you’ll be fine”!

And he was right – they have a very different perception of cold here... View from the mountain just staggering – I won’t even bother to explain, but the glassy pacific really gave the impression that we were at the end of the world.

More bar action in the evening – nothing truly spectacular.

Sunday 4 February 2001

Decided today to go it alone to Kirstenbosch. Weather today = best yet. Probably around 30 degrees C and not a cloud in sight.

Well, Kirstenbosch is just achingly gorgeous. Acres and acres of landscaped lawns and rockeries etc and also a network of trails wandering up into the mountain. I did a two-hour walk that took in forest, rock scrambling and a waterfall, and it was quite magnificent listening to Rachmaninoff as I ascended.

The descent was to music from American Beauty, and I couldn’t help but think that the concept of too much beauty for the mind to grasp could well apply here.

Now I sit eating ostrich biltong and drinking Castle lager. At 5.30pm there will be a live concert of Latin American music in the auditorium so soon I will totter off to find a space in the sun. C’est la vie!

Evening spent with Alex and Geoff at the fabulous Nelson’s Eye restaurant and the most ridiculously large piece of steak I have ever had the privilege to devour. And some very fine wines too.

Then off to Cool Runnings where we hooked up with more English folks. Turning into a bit of a big ‘un – bed, very pissed on shooters including one that was just tequila and very hot Tabasco sauce, at 2.30am. Shit.

Monday 5 February 2001

Yet another great day. Well, not the 8am start (exceptionally hungover). But upwards from there on Cape Peninsula tour.

First stop = a coffee. Then penguin colony at Boulders Beach – a stunning location. Then onto Cape of Good Hope national park for picnic lunch, where we were

pestered by baboons. It was all quite primeval – we had to protect ourselves by throwing rocks at the monkeys!

More animal viewing in the form of an ostrich and her babies crapping and projectile pissing all over the place. Lovely!

Then the Cape Point itself. How astounding – it really felt like the end of the world, and the views were suitably apocalyptic and beautiful. A walk over to Cape of Good Hope itself was punctuated by rock scrambling and soothing sea sounds. Heavenly.

Then a pretty intense bike ride (how unfit am I?!) before heading home.

Topped off with a Castle on the deck overlooking the tablecloth.

Life is good.

Tuesday 6 February 2001

Unbelievably hot today. So much so that I spent the whole time mooching about and even slept for a couple of hours during the evening.

Met up with Ben in the evening.

What a boat! It is huge – about £12m worth apparently. I felt like royalty and have to admit that it was pretty cool to be drinking Castles on the sundeck with a load of tourists looking on.

We went to the Hard Rock Café and Ben's roommate Darren got chatting to two South African girls so the boys impressed them with a tour of the Mikado and I discovered two fans of biltong!

I even got a lift home throw into the deal. So overall a pretty good evening. I still can't believe the state of that yacht though – bloody hell.

Wednesday 7 February 2001

We went to Stellenbosch today for a break from the city and some fine wines. Lunch in a nice little bistro in town, followed by a stroll around the Cape Dutch buildings. Scorching hot again.

The up to Berghelder Vineyards for a tour and tasting. Quite interesting, especially the cellars built into the mountainside.

Met a nice American called Cynthia who I reminisced about Chicago with. Bought a couple of nice red wines for the onward trip.

Tonight am taking the girl who works behind the bar at Ashanti out to Cool Runnings. I feel like a different person here – a kind of social chameleon. I like it!

Spent evening at Cool Runnings drinking cocktails and smoking hubbly-bubbly (apple only!) with three complete strangers till 2am! Wicked.

Thursday 8 February 2001

Oudtshoorn, South Africa

Marathon travel day. Up at 7.00 to catch the Baz Bus and didn't arrive in Oudtshoorn til 5.30pm, but a beautiful hostel and very friendly.

Hooked up with three others: Kelly, mad woman Hilde and Glen the action man. Much drinking ensued and my first braai, with ostrich steak and sausage. Delicious.

Got chatting to v. nice South Africans from Durban and have thus got myself invited for dinner. They departed on vast motorbikes – Harley roaring v. impressively.

Bed at 1.30 but kept awake by my first real dorm experience – listening to Hilde (mid-50s, ugly) and Glen (mid-30s, ugly) perform a variety of blowjobs and screwing until 5am. Lovely.

Friday 9 February 2001

Just before noon; about to go into **Cango Caves** after truly spectacular bike ride down from top of **Swartberge Pass** (2000m; 24km). Exhilarating in the extreme and terrifying for the first 5km or so, not to mention utterly exhausting!

29km to go, and much flatter, not as downhill...

Caves were truly magnificent...vast, visually imposing and beautifully presented with clever lighting etc. by the hosts. Then lunch (crocodile meat – kind of like chicken meets fish) in unbelievable heat and continuation with only half the party going to bike.

Me and this German guy battled our way through the heat to ostrich farm. What funny animals – graceless and rather Jurassic Park-like. I rode one – they are very strong and very fast!

Back to “Paradise” (the hostel) and a much-needed plunge in the pool.

Saturday 10 February 2001

Wilderness, South Africa

Sitting on **Outenique Choo Tjoe** train in George Station. It is a beautiful old steam train; you could quite easily be back in the 40s.

This morning, I hitched a lift with the German couple (Saskia and Arndt, I think) to the waterfall – absolutely perfect setting. I plunged into the water and then went the whole hog and stood under the cascades – absolutely magnificent experience but freezing cold!

Now en route to Wilderness, I will get my first shot at a beach!

Well Wilderness is certainly a change. At the moment I am sitting with the sound of crickets chanting loudly in the background. Most immediately I have the sound of Elgar’s Enigma Variations, and I am writing this under the light of my Maglite (thank you Sarah!). The stars are magnificent, as is the moon.

At this hostel (**Fairy Knowe**) they have 4 dogs, 2 cats, 2 pigs and 2 horses – and it is in an absolutely beautiful location. Not only is the sea nearby (and provides a constant purr) but there is also a lagoon and river, not to mention the fantastically dilapidated railway station.

Earlier I walked into town and bought a sarong (sorry Dad!) and then walked back along the beach with the sun on my back. And about half an hour ago I got back from a solitary dinner in town. I ate like a king – prawns (well langoustines really) followed by ostrich steak.

I ordered a carafe of wine, thinking I’d get about 3 glasses’ worth, and was presented with a litre (cost: £1.50) which of course I felt obliged to drink. Then, of course, I felt equally obliged to walk back to the hostel (about 2.5km) via the boardwalk next to the lagoon. Naturally, this was in pitch dark and I soon found myself plunging to the ground a metre below (luckily not the lagoon!).

Viva la bruise tomorrow.

God, I write a load (of shit) when I’m pissed...

A demain; back to Elgar, the stars and the moon.

Sunday 11 February 2001

Walked up to the forest today. Waterfall after a hike of a couple of hours. V picturesque, especially the 2 waterfalls at the top.

I clambered up to the very top of the rock formations (pretty hair-raising stuff) and then had a swim in the pools beneath the waterfalls. Water was a nice temp.

Swam behind and through one of the cascades – very exciting.

Evening spent chatting with two Brits and two Aussies in the local hotel bar about this, that and the other. Continuing the conversation in the kitchen of the hostel we got a bollocking from some old German woman. Pretty unfair since we were only chatting quietly, but there we go.

Monday 12 February 2001

Plettenburg Bay (The Craggs), South Africa

Sitting in the lovely Fairy Knowe lodge – I think Clarissa the 11-year-old pig is grunting nearby – awaiting the Baz Bus.

Today I went canoeing from the lagoon up the Touw River with Emelyn, Caroline, David and Linda. Quite a laugh, and I think we spent more time in the water than in the canoes! Mud slinging was also involved and I have therefore had to have a shower and change since getting back.

While the others headed to the waterfall, I walked back along the Bospruit Trail – exceptional views from the top of the mountain over the river and other peaks. Absolutely beautiful.

Well of course the **Baz Bus** was late and so I didn't arrive in Plett Bay til late. A beautiful hostel though – like a big colonial homestead with poolside bar and floodlit tennis court. Very quiet though - only my roommate Mark for company. So I took advantage and was in bed by 10, and asleep very soon afterwards!

Tuesday 13 February 2001

What a soggy day! Absolutely miserable drizzle, but not to be put off I embarked on the 10km or so bicycle ride to Nature's Valley. Traversed the spectacular **Groot River Pass**, and did a 1 ½ hour hike up into the mountains from the beach. Stunning views from the lookout points – like a model seaside village.

The one and only shop was interesting too – selling not only the standard food fare but also essentials like toilet bowls and cisterns. Fascinating.

Ride back was shattering – UP the Groot's River Pass this time, encountering intimidation from baboons and torrential rain showers as I went. It all felt very adventurous.

Evening spent playing S.A. Trivial Pursuits – quite interesting, especially the SA history questions etc! Then chatted into the night about Canadian and US politics – very interesting, and no doubt the typical backpacker conversation. But not alcohol-fuelled this time!

Wednesday 14 February 2001

Stormsrivier, South Africa

Valentine's Day – most loathsome of the year!

Another we start. I hitched a lift with kindly couple into Plettenburg Bay proper and now sit writing this in a local café. The sun has finally returned, and the search for a new pair of sunglasses is about to begin, my previous trusty pair having fallen foul of Wilderness' intense Pacific undercurrents.

More Baz Bus fun to be had later this PM as I head to Stormsrivier.

Am now lying in bed at Rainbow Lodge in Stormsrivier after a great night of braai and booze. It's funny what people like – the 'kindly couple' at Plett hated this place, but they were looking for peace and quiet I guess.

I met a nice and very lively couple of French guys and have thus been brushing up on my French. As I lie writing this, I can hear them giggling next door. It's fun!

I'm glad I'm in this mindset, otherwise I supposed it'd be annoying. Vive les voyages.

Thursday 15 February 2001

Woke up to beautiful weather, but not such a beautiful headache after last night's indulgence at the braai.

Spent a couple of hours reading my wonderful book – since finished – Tony Parsons, Man and Boy – and awaiting emergence of Atika and Gael, the French folks.

When they crawled out of bed, we hitched a lift to the **Tsitsikamma National Park**. We walked about 1km to the famous (and wobbly) bridge, and took a short but sweet boat ride.

I thanked my lucky stars that I am travelling alone, for Atika is a BIG girl and thus about quadrupled our hiking time. Then I trekked along the coast about 3km to a beautiful waterfall that plunges directly into the sea – magnificent swimming.

Back to the bilton shop (kudu biltong rules, man!) and I now sit by the pool, having taken a quick plunge, drinking a Castle and watching the sun turn golden on the Tsitsikamma mountains above me.

Friday 16 February 2001

Port Elizabeth, South Africa

Am now enjoying a somewhat early sundown – sunset drink. I'm pretty tired today. Woke up early and was up and about by 8.30ish. Decided to take on the forest hikes – probably about 10-15km of fairly flat walks through the indigenous forest.

It was nice to be in the shade for a change, and there were some truly spectacular trees – one called (appropriately enough) 'the big tree' was over 800 years old and proved quite a sight.

I toddled down to the Storms River, which is tea-coloured on account of the tannins which are transferred from leaves which collect at the top of the river (like steeping a tea bag).

Arriving back at around 2pm, I have spent the PM siestaing and generally being lazy as I await the arrival of our friend the Baz Bus, en route to PE.

Saturday 17 February 2001

What a strange day. The hostel is great – absolutely beautifully clean, spacious, and enhanced for me by the presence of my old pool-playing chum Daniela.

We decided to go into town on the advice of some fellow guests and the management, and walked for about ½ hour to get in.

Just making our way up to the Tourist Info, I heard Daniela shout 'get away from me!' and the next thing I know, my camera's being pilfered from my shorts pocket.

All happened very quickly, but that worked to my advantage because they didn't get my wallet or all-important money belt.

So a bit shaken up, we caught a taxi to a shopping centre where I found a police station and Daniela booked on/our Greyhound.

In the afternoon after a quick swim, walked to the Waterfront – much safer!

We went to an incredibly new ents complex called The Boardwalk – kind of Disneyland meets Riverside. There was a casino, so I too my first shot at losing money there and then.

After delicious braai by yours truly, eventually went out to bar/club and stayed up til 2.30am!

Sunday 18 February 2001

Port Alfred, South Africa

Well, the torrents have returned.

Having arrived here in Port Alfred ludicrously early (9am, well before any of the other guests were conscious) it's been rain all the way.

The Baz Bus was predictably yuck – just too early, especially after such a late night!

It's hard to judge this place in the rain. Pretty grim is the overall impression, although I've just enjoyed a very nice steak sandwich in one of the local pubs. Maybe it's brightening....who knows?

East London tomorrow, and Jenni's parents if they ever answer the phone!

Monday 19 February 2001

Kayser's Beach, South Africa

Well I spent a wonderful day. Doug met me off the Baz and we did an 8am drive along a dirt road to Kayser's Beach.

Doug and Grethel have a lovely, cool summery home with a delightful view of the bay between two deeply forested hills. Better still they also have a beach buggy which roars into action and has no difficulty on the soft and fine yellow sand!

We drove down to the beach but decided against a swim – too wet and cold still. I spent the afternoon watching DSTV and enjoying the luxuries that a home has to offer, including my own double bed and bathroom!

Had a delicious meal in the evening – huge steak and veggies and good red wine. It was nice just to enjoy some company too, and we talked into the night.

Tuesday 20 February 2001

Mild hangover (babelas) remedied by divine breakfast of home-grown fruit salad and home-produced eggs, which had wonderful rich yolks.

Doug and I then went for a beach walk to the river mouth, and crossed our fingers to see what the weather would do. We also discussed my onward plans – I'm going to stay here a couple more nights and then move on to Cintsa and Coffee Bay Before reaching Durban.

Wednesday 21 February 2001

Well you know they say you learn a new thing every day, and I feel that in the past four days, I've really been spoiled in that respect. Today, for example, we got up early (in my book) to go fishing. I couldn't believe I was doing this – what a boring, uneventful sport, I had always thought.

And yet, what an experience. There I stood for 2 ½ hours, watching the sea – at first it rained, then the sun made an appearance, the sea changed colour and texture, and the morning seemed to evaporate.

We caught no fish, but wrenched huge mussels from the rocks instead. A delicious omelette for lunch, and then the afternoon just disappeared – a little siesta, a tour of the garden, a sniff of the herbs, feeding the hens and harvesting the eggs, enjoying the sun, running some errands, discussing the village gossip.

And then an evening braai and more talk. It's amazing to hear about so many diverse topics – killer dogs, the problems of South African integration (I keep my trap shut much of the time, although I get the feeling that there is real effort going in there) and the horror of premature deaths – Grethel's 2 brothers, nieces and nephews and Judith, whose death has so influenced this family.

Also had the cheapest ever haircut (20R, under £2) vs most expensive ever in USA (\$15 + \$50 parking fine = \$65 = £50!)

Thursday 22 February 2001

Today the sun was out in force. Doug and I took full advantage, embarking on a two-hour stroll u the beach in the afternoon, but not before we took a little trip into [Kidd's Beach](#) – a slightly larger and more developed version of Kayser's.

On the way back we got some fresh sweetcorn (a good lunch) and then we set off on a walk to [Sea Vale and Christmas Rock](#). Glorious untrammelled beaches heralded my first dip in the Indian Ocean – lovely and refreshing!

Another walk in the PM down to the 'bush' (dense forest around the river) led into an evening of delicious SA food (bobah) and drinks and watching David and Jenni's wedding video.

I shall be sorry to leave here – it's so nice to feel truly at home, and even the dog is OK. All the same, I'm excited to be going to Cintsa.

Friday 23 February 2001

Cintsa, South Africa

Not pleasant getting up early this morning, but places to go and new people to meet.

We had a lovely boiled egg breakfast before heading off in the car to **EL**. It seems to be about the size of Norwich and parts are really beautiful – we drove through suburbs like Nahoon and Bunkers Hill: very nice, MC, but of course completely white.

Then we drove to the estuary and took in the view that D and J had for their wedding – absolutely stunning.

Shopping in a mall (and me being ridiculously fussed over) and then it was off on the Baz Bus.

Arrived in **Buccaneers** about 2pm. It is truly a stunning place – a rambling farm complex set on a lagoon and sea mouth. Very sociable too: spent a v pleasant evening on a booze cruise and swim (for free!) up the Cintsa river, and then boozing in the lively bar and playing embarrassingly awful pool til 2am. Very pleasant!

Saturday 24 February 2001

Yuk. Worst hangover yet, which I work off with a morning walk on the beach.

Have just watched The Matrix, and now I sit in the pool/bar/volleyball area, which is surrounded by indigenous trees and plants. Very restful, and a nice change from the heat – the 4pm sunlight is lovely.

Well I got drawn in to a game of volleyball – highly embarrassing due to my overall lack of physical prowess. But good fun anyway.

From there to a traditional **Xhosa** meal – very stodgy food, but interesting nonetheless. Absolutely surrounded by couples though – feels pretty odd

sometimes, when couples pair off and us poor lone travellers have to go off to bed early. Which is precisely where I'm headed...

Sunday 25 February 2001

Lazy, lazy day. Morning spent by the pool, sunning self. Then watched The Pelican Brief before meeting up with Nick, Mike, Dawn and Ally, who I met in the Cape.

Played tennis (and won!) at 6ish, and then embarked on SERIOUS drinking...Skittles vodka! Oh Lord.

Monday 26 February 2001

Coffee Bay, South Africa

Worst hangover yet. In fact, woke up at 11.30am still plastered. A real struggle to get up...

Now on Baz Bus en route to Coffee Bay. Long and painful journey on the bus and then shuttle drive through soupy fog. Quite an experience on the Transkei's dodgy roads.

Finally arrived at the **Coffee Shack** around 6pm and by 7pm was up at the local hotel for a magnificent 4-course meal. Chatted with staff of hostel, a guy called Richard who's at the end of his travels, and an obnoxious Yank.

Why is it that Americans have so much difficulty understanding cultural difference? Yesterday I met a whole posse who were busy considering where the nearest McDonald's was... I try not to be judgemental but they don't do themselves any favours.

I don't know if the Xhosa have McDonald's!

Spent the evening (til 2 bloody am) playing pool and drinking Castle...I'm definitely improving!

Tuesday 27 February 2001

Pancake Day – we completely forgot it!

Spent morning walking to a nearby beach and taking in the scenery. It's amazing for me because I have studied the Xhosa (**the Nuer tribe**) and so to be able to see all the cattle and mud huts and to hear the strange 'clicking' of the language is quite an experience.

I haven't come across any urine-flavoured cheese yet though.

Then after a lazy PM, Ali arrived – my old Cape Town buddies, but only one of them. The rest – Harri, Dawn, Nick – turned up later on a minibus taxi desperate for beer, so we all reminisced about the terrible morning after the night before in Cintra. Harri (aka Mike) had been puking all night and had kept the other eleven people up til 41m. Oh dear.

So we had a more tame evening, although others in the bar playing killer pool and doing the tequila challenge (including eating a whole raw egg and downing a shot of tequila afterwards!) were not so controlled...

Wednesday 28 February 2001

Woke up with the sun. Me, Harri and Nick decided to walk to the [Hole in the Wall](#). Absolutely BAKING hot and a pretty up-and-down hike, but stunning scenery.

Along the way we picked up a guide – a little Xhosa kid, 12 years old, and fast!

Hole in the Wall provided a refreshing swimming hole and the nearby hotel a welcome drink. We walked back along the road in the heat, with a dog that somehow attached itself to us.

Back at 4 and then immediately off again for sundowners in the forest – very beautiful but a hell of a car journey in an open-backed xxxx 4x4 with us all crammed in. Not good for the arse.

Got back with 25 mins to spare before dinner at the Ocean (?) View – very welcome food and wine after a heavy-going day.

In bar afterward, got into a political argument with white SAs, but they bought tequila, so at least tolerable.