South Africa 2011
Addo Elephant NP - Johannesburg

Leg details

Date April 13 - May 3, 2011
Leg Addo Elephant NP - Baviaanskloof Wilderness Area - Cango Caves - Swartberg Pass - Karoo NP - Carnarvon (ZA) - Namaqua 4x4 Track - Johannesburg

On Wednesday morning, April 13, 2011, after some extensive shopping in Cradock we head south over the mountains on the N10. Outside of Cradock there are many ostrich farms. It is a bit sad to see the large birds in such small fenced in corrals when we have just seen them in the open space of Mountain Zebra NP.

It rains every so often, especially at lunch time as we try to get into the back section ..... There are many construction sites too especially on the Olifantskop Pass ..... it's a shame that the weather is so bad, the views would have been nice from the pass.

In Paterson we turn into R342 and drive to Addo Elephant National Park. We check for sites and as already told on the phone there are no free caravan sites. But we are invited to check the tent sites to see if the OKA fits.

We find a perfect one just beside the waterhole that is illuminated at night!!!

There are many construction sites too especially on the Olifantskop Pass ..... it's a shame that the weather is so bad, the views would have been nice from the pass.

As we had seen the campers of our neighbours from Mt. Zebra NP Ruedi goes for a walk / chat. When he comes back he tells that he has found Dagmar and Thomas, the two Germans we had met at the Royal Natal NP a week ago. We stop for a chat and agree to later on join them for their braai.

We go for a walk through the camp and stop at the bird hide. The birds are very busy getting a last feed before the night and Susi is frustrated that she cannot get good pictures, especially of the really cute Red Bishop.

When we join Tom and Dagmar they tell us that they have actually driven the Sani Pass and also gone past the Katse Dam up in Lesotho.

As advised by Dagmar and Thomas we drive the Gorah Loop and find some Elephants with a baby, some Elands ..... Thanks to the recent rains the flowers are starting to appear. In a few days it will be one big flower garden.

In the late afternoon the sky starts clearing up .....
As we come back to our site we see an Elephant on the other side of the pond that is walking towards the viewing area. Quickly we grab the camera and head over. We even find a good spot in the underground hide and can watch the Elephant as it drinks and sprays itself.

Click here for a movie on it (file type: .wmv, size: 1'553 KB).

On Friday morning we get up at 5 AM to call NAB to get the debit card issue sorted. This time we are really organised: we have downloaded all statements, have sorted all credit card receipts and even have our internet-over-mobile-connection up and running. When we log into the NAB web site we see that they have had a software glitch and some accounts are not updated / may show wrong totals .... that means trouble .... And sure enough when we try calling them there is a taped message announcing long waiting times. With a sat phone and $ 2.70 per minute that is not really what we need so we hang up and postpone the issue to next week.

But getting up at such an early time of the day for a bank brings its advantages: we are now ready for an early morning game drive!

As the weather looks promising we want to explore the southern part of the park. We begin with the Gorah Loop again as that seems to be the best animal viewing area. Soon after we turn into it we see a large group of buffaloes.

Next is a group of Kudus .... and in that group we see a baby Buffalo without its mother. It is such a sad sight to see the little one calling for its mother and knowing that it will not survive for long this way ......

We drive some more loops then stop at the Spekboom Hide & Tented Camp but nothing is happening at the water hole, just a bird enjoying the sun.

Then suddenly we have some Elephants right in front of us on the road. How good is this!

The mother obviously does not like the fact that there are vehicles so close on both sides of her and the baby and flaps with the ears. Once the other vehicle backs away a bit she relaxes ....

Click here for a movie on it (file type: .wmv, size: 1'561 KB).

Later on we have a closer look at the flightless Dung Beetles which are under protection in the park. There are signs everywhere that they have right of way and one should drive around them if possible ... which makes driving a constant slalom ride!

Just before we reach Marion Baree Waterhole we see a group of Elephants. They seem to be heading towards the waterhole. So we stop the OKA just beside the waterhole and get the camera ready.

What a great sighting!
The smallest baby Elephant does not yet seem to know what to do with its trunk and even slips on the mud!

Click here for a movie on it (file type: .wmv, size: 3'358 KB).

We head further south and the road takes us over a few hills.
The country changes from the green scrubs to a mixture of shrubs and cacti.

There are many flowers blooming and Susi gets quite frustrated because she is not allowed to leave the vehicle (penalty is 800 Rand per person if they catch you ...).

We drive the Harvey’s Loop.

Only a few years back this section was opened to the animals and not too many Elephants have moved into it so the scrub is still dense .... but there is also not much to be seen ..... 

Then we reach a clearing and get a view of the coast and the Woody Cape Section.

But the weather is deteriorating and we decide to turn around and head back.

As we get closer to Marion Barel Waterhole a large bull Elephant blocks the road.

He seems a bit agitated and the vehicle that is approaching from the other side decides to back away.

Somehow the Elephant does not seem to worry about us so we can watch closely as the whole herd crosses the road.

It seems to be the same group that we saw at the waterhole in the morning.

When the last one of them has crossed the road Ruedi starts the OKA and starts driving .... and there is another large bull we haven’t noticed in the scrub just beside the OKA!

Ruedi puts his foot down (as much as you can with an OKA ....) and we quickly drive past the bull ...

The driver of the other vehicle who had watched the scene gives us a “thumbs up” with a wide grin on his face ....

Later on we see Dagmar and Thomas’ truck coming towards us.

They are leaving and want to go tho the Woody Cape Hut, the part of Addo Elephant NP that is at the ocean, and do a two-day hike over the dunes.

We head back to the camp and have a quiet rest of the day working a bit on the web page.

On Saturday the weather looks ok so we plan a game drive for the late afternoon.

Ruedi gets busy with some repairs.

He has a leaking air bag and needs to find out what it is.

He finds that it is a seam that is not vulcanised properly ..... a warranty case ..... 

The weather deteriorates again and just as Ruedi finishes packing away his tools the rain sets in.

It is a grey and wet afternoon ..... so much for today’s game drive!

But at least we finish publishing the web page today.

We leave Addo Elephant NP on Sunday, April 17, and drive south on R335, then west on R334 to Uitenhage.

Outside of the town there are large areas with slums.

Just beside it new houses are being built.

They all look the same and it looks as if the people from the slums are being relocated and then the old slum is demolished.

In the middle of the whole set-up there is a large school.

That is a good sign.

We head into Uitenhage to stock up.

On the way out we pass another large settlement with small social housing.

We start climbing into mountains again.

The weather cannot make up its mind.

Will it rain or not?

Along the coast it looks more or less fine but in the mountains (and that is where we are heading to ....) it is overcast and grey.

We stay on the R102 and travel through the Old Van Stadens Bridge.

From down there the new and modern bridge with the N2 on it spanning the valley. It looks impressive .... almost pretty.

We turn into the R331 and now cross the N2.

From the top of the bridge we get a great view of the area we will go into .... green rolling mountains .... nice!

We want to stop for lunch at the Loeri Dam View Point but a sign prohibiting firearms and PHOTOCAMERAS (!!!!!) puts us off and we turn around.

Right after the overflow of the dam a gravel track leads to the same dam ..... but from the other side ....

So we drive up there and enjoy lunch with views onto the dam AND take pictures of it!

The R331 is marked as "scenic route" and it deserves it.

It is a pretty green valley with views of mountains.

We reach Patensie, which is surrounded by citrus orchards.

The red soil and the different greens make a nice contrast.

The road becomes R332 and shortly after the Gamtos River turns to a gravel track.

It is time to lower the tyre pressure!

We get the entry permit to the Baviaanskloof Wilderness Area and head towards the entry gate.

As Susi reads the small imprint on the form she sees that we have to be out of the park before the gates close, and they close at 6 PM giving us just a bit more than 3 hours.

As we have no clue about the status of the track we ask at the gate.

They say that we will require two ours for the 46 km between the two gates.

Ok, so we had in.
We drive through a narrow valley. Some rock faces shine red in the late afternoon light.

Then the track starts climbing up to the first pass. It is rather narrow and tilts towards the valley facing side. Luckily there is not much traffic at this time of the day.

We reach the plateaux and the track gets muddy and slippery. This is definitely not an area to be when it rains.

At the Cable Car lookout we meet a group of people who just drove up from the other side of the pass. They tell us that the way down is a bit rougher but we should not have a problem.

It is definitively steeper but the ruts have been filled with concrete so it does not really cause a problem.

We reach the bottom and drive through a river bed. There are Baboons, Greater Kudu and other animals that we don't know.

Then the track heads up again. It is not as challenging as the first pass. When the 46 km track are up there is no gate.

By now it is 5:30 PM and we get a bit nervous. Some 8 km later on we reach the gate and check out at 5:45 PM.

Note to the reader:
From our point of view this track should only be driven in dry conditions.
Also, for vehicles like ours 2 hours is not enough and it is too narrow for real trucks.
But it is very pretty and we enjoyed it.

Right outside of the Wilderness Area we find an unoccupied holiday house and decide to stay for the night.
An almost full moon rises on a cloudless sky and the Baboons bark ....

On Monday morning we hear the Baboons again. They are paying a visit to the unoccupied guest house.
One also comes over to where we stand but is not really interested in the OKA.
It is probably not yet stored in its memory as "the large white thing that contains food and some toys" ....

We continue on our way and drive through a pretty valley.

The rocks change in colour from deep red to white and ochre. Then again we turn into a narrow chasm, a drive in a river bed, and every so often there are Baboons on the side of the road .... we love it.
Some interesting plants are flowering.

The road climbs up to the Nuwekloof Pass.
On top here is very little vegetation.
Then we reach the end of the Baviaanskloof Wilderness Area and turn west onto a smaller gravel road.
When we reach the N9 we head south for a few km and then turn west onto the R341.

High mountains start appearing on the horizon.
This is where we are heading to.
We come past the Kammanassie Berge.
At one time we come past a wall of red rock that reminds us of the wall in Kings Canyon, just much shorter.
As it is already afternoon the light comes from the wrong direction for good photos.
In the morning it must be very nice.
After passing through De Rust we pick the gravel road along the Swartberg Mountains.
There are many Ostrich farms.
Too many animals are kept in corals and there is not a blade of grass left on the ground, all has been eaten by the birds.
At one time there is an Eco-Reserve at the other side of the track and the difference is only too visible ....
They seem to have a water problem here.
Many dams are empty and the only fields that are green are the ones with irrigations.

Soon the track climbs up into the mountains.
We come past the Raubenheimer Dam which is not full either.
Then we reach the bitumen again and the R328.
We turn north to the Cango Caves.
When we arrive at 3 PM the tour is just leaving.

The first chamber we reach is the largest, three more follow.

The formations are nice.
But they are dry which takes the sparkle away.

After the caves we continue on towards the Swartberg Pass and find ourselves a spot for the night.
As this area is marked with "wild camping" spots we don't worry at all.
On Tuesday morning we get up really early to call our bank again relating Ruedi's blocked internet account.
We are informed that all has been blocked and the only way to get it re-activated is by sending them a fax of a certified passport copy for identification purposes.
As if one would be able to certify a document sent by fax!
Ruedi tries to compress the file as much as possible but cannot get the file to below 1,5 MB which is too much to be sent over a sat phone connection.
Besides that the fax-software for the Sat-Phone is currently not installed.
So we decide to send it to our NAB branch manager in good quality by regular mail instead and ask her to get this sorted.
Let's see what comes back.
As Ruedi fights with modern technology Susi gets also busy with some Swiss paperwork that has to be sent in as well.
In other words: the atmosphere in the OKA is really relaxed ........ grumble grumble grumble ....
Shortly before 9 AM (bl.... 4 hours for paperwork, and that in the middle of the night!!) we finish and decide to drive up to the pass for breakfast.
It is a glorious day, not a single cloud on the sky.

The gravel road is well maintained. It reminds us of the Tremola, the famous old gravel road over the Gotthard Pass in Switzerland.

We find a great spot for breakfast, even picnic tables are provided! And the views!

Note to the reader:

Two weeks later our German friends Thomas and Dagmar got caught by snow at the same location and had to turn around due to icy road conditions ...
For more of their pictures visit their trip "Winter in Afrika".

Then we continue on. Soon we reach "The Top", the watershed.

We hike up to the top of the hill and enjoy 270° views. And what views they are!!

On the descent on the north side the view of the canyon is impressive.

On the way down the track gets a bit narrower. The rocks are all red and one can see the fault lines. The sediment layers are basically 90° up, very impressive.

The drive through the gully is very nice. But this is definitely not a spot to be when it rains; the gravel road basically goes through the river bed!

Then we reach the end of our dirt track and turn onto the R407 that takes us into Prince Albert.
This must be the prettiest little town we have travelled through in South Africa so far, all neat and clean, the houses with well-maintained little gardens ... just nice.
In the middle of the town we turn east onto gravel again and head over to the N12. The country is dry and reminds us of Australia ... only the kangaroos are missing ....
We come past a large Leopard Tortoise.
Then we reach bitumen again and head to Beaufort West on the N12. After some shopping we drive into the Karoo National Park.

The mountains look as if they had fortresses on their tops.
Huge rock walls sit on top of the table mountains.
Tomorrow we will inspect the secrets behind them ......

In the evening a family stops for a chat.
He is from Namibia and gives us lots of information on where we should drive through and where it is not worth going.

On Wednesday, April 20, we wake up to a cloudless sky.
It is dry and windy.
We pack our things and around 10 AM head out into the park.

First we head up to the view point on the Klipspringerpass.
Sadly the rest of the pass is blocked of as the road got damaged during the recent rains.
We turn around and start the Potlekertjie Loop.

We drive and drive and drive but all we come past are some groups of Ostriches.
Otherwise there are not many animals to be seen .... and if we see any, they are so shy that they start running away long before we come close enough to have a look at them!
A bit frustrated we decide to stop for a bit of work at the Doornhoek Picnic Area and only continue on in the afternoon.

On the way to the area we come past a large group of Baboons.
We decide to drive the long Nuweveld Loop 4x4 track.
The track soon turns into a real 4x4 track, with rocky sections, dry riverbed crossings .... a good exercise for Ruedi.
But again we don’t see many animals and the ones that we see are even shyer than the ones in the morning. Again they run away as soon as they see us.

Once back in camp we head to the reception a bit frustrated and ask where the animals are .....?
The lady says that on windy days like today the animals can hardly be seen ..... ok, at least that is clarified.
And she also says that we should get on to the game drive early in the morning.
So tomorrow we will get up really early and leave camp as soon as the gate opens.

On Thursday morning we are woken by our alarm clock.
The wind has died so we get up and quickly get ready for the game drive.

And it is worth it.
Besides large groups of Zebras (they have both types in Karoo) we see Gemsbok or Oryx as we know it, Red Hartebeests, Elands and many smaller groups of Springboks.
We also see “dancing” Ostriches: they lift their wings and make pirouettes around each other.
We had been advised from the lady in the reception to drive the short 4x4 Afsvaal Loop.
Also the lions had been sighted there yesterday.
And believe it or not, we spot a lioness.
It is our first self-spotted lion!
Shame she was so far away.
All excited we return to the camp where we spend the day with more normal things like washing and working on the PCs.

We try to get a reservation for the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park but all is booked out solidly .... figures, its Easter .... Susi is quite frustrated because she has been in Ruedi's ears for quite a while that we should reserve some special places.

In the evening we are invited at Pierre and Estelle, the family from Namibia, for dinner. Together with their friends, Francois and family, we freeze our bums of, but nevertheless we have a good time.

Pierre and Estelle also advise us to try the Botswana side of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park as the camps there are not fancy at all and the South Africans don't like it. Thanks for the nice braai, the good tips and the great company!

The temperature falls to about 4°C. It is getting really cold and uncomfortable so by 10 PM we "head home".

We wake up on Easter Friday to find hoarfrost on the roof and on some sections of the grass.

Winter is coming ....

We pack up and head again over to the Klipspringer Pass Drive that had been closed until yesterday.

We see Klipspringers, Oryx, Black Eagles and many other animals.

Then we head into town to stock up for the next 2 – 3 weeks.

We will be leaving civilization soon.

We try to reach the Botswana Parks and Reserves Reservations Office to book for the Kgalagadi again but nobody picks up the phone.

Well, can’t blame them, it is Easter Friday after all!

We decide to head north and try again on Saturday.

We pick the R381 and drive up the Molteno Pass.

It is a pretty road, first tar then gravel, that winds up the red rocky mountains.

Then we continue on to the Roseberg Pass which brings us to a highland.

Endless sections of fenced off pasture, some empty some with sheep on them stretch out.

Narrow one-way bridges are a bit wider than the OKA but we would not like to try them out with a MAN or vehicle with a similar track with.

We come past Riverie Rabbit Conservancy and wonder what this is.

Rabbits ....???

There are plenty of them in Australia!!!!

There are large swarm of Grasshopper or Locust.

Ruedi has to slow down at times so he does not plaster the OKA with dead animals.

Click here for a movie on it (file type: .wmv, size: 3'358 KB).

Later on we spot a Caracal that is walking along the road. Also some Dassies cross the road but disappear quickly in the rocks.

Here we can also see that autumn is here .... the leaves are turning red ....

On the way Ruedi’s GPS or the Tracks4Africa map-software has a glitch which first results in an intensive discussion between the driver and his navigator: The displayed map shows a different name for a town depending on the selected resolution on the GPS, once Loxton and once Carnarvon ..... strange ..... We reach Loxton.

It is a funny town.

The church sits in a round-about in the middle of the town and all traffic goes around it.
We change over to the R63 and head east until we reach Carnarvon.

We decide to camp in the community caravan park.

We go to the "reception" and are informed that they already had to turn the books in for the end of month bookkeeping and in turn are unable to collect the camp fees.

We can camp for free and save the 27 Rand for the night.

When we tell people that we are from Carnarvon in Australia they like it. We too.

We settle down and start updating our PCs.

As the connection is slow Ruedi leaves his PC to download the service packs over night.

In the morning we realise that the internet is dead.

Susi calls Vodacom to see if they can help, but it seems to be a general problem, trying to reach the server via SMS or phone call returns an error message.

After a while the server can be reached again but when we try to login to the internet over the phone the connection fails.

Calling Vodacom does not help either so we give up.

We will have to do whatever bookings over the phone.

We get busy with the planning of our Namibia trip.

The next availabilities at the camps in the Kgalakgadi Transfrontier Park are middle of May.

So we change plan. We will first head over to the Fish River Canyon and then will have head to the Kgalakgadi Park. The total detour will be around 1400km.

As the Internet is not available Susi gets on the phone to make the reservation with SANParks and gets placed in the waiting queue.

30 minutes later and 50 Rand poorer she gives up.

We will try again after Easter.

Today is Easter Saturday and the South Africans have a heap of days off which are used by many to make a whole week of holidays out of it.

In the late afternoon a thunderstorm arrives.

We only get a bit of rain in Carnarvon but we are a bit worried about the gravel roads we intend to travel on. Even though the sun is shining there are clouds building up.

As we will be travelling on gravel roads today we hope that the weather stays dry.

This also seems to be Mongoose country.

Every so often we see one cross the road.

On Easter Sunday is Ruedi's birthday.

As his family will be calling we stay in phone reception area and have a bit of time to have a look at Carnarvon.

The area around Carnarvon is famous for their Corbelled Houses. Houses that have been built solely out of stones.

In those days there was no such thing as a scaffold so they built the access to the roof into it.

The road for a while leads through some low mountains with nice rock formations.

We see some mushrooms on the road. We also see some mushrooms and wonder, if they are eatable.

They look like a mushroom we know from Switzerland, but we don't dare trying them.

Next we have a look at some Social Weaver nests built on active telephone poles.

Amazing little birds.

Whole colonies of birds build one big nest.

Interesting is also the way they build their nests and exit tunnels.

We don't know what to expect from the weather; even though the sun is shining there are clouds building up.

As we will be travelling on gravel roads today we hope that the weather stays dry.

We reach a place with small salt lakes / pans and the going gets a bit slower.

Every so often the water has washed sand onto the road and there is also corrugation every so often.

In the distance we can see the Meerkat Radio Telescope.

We reach an area with small salt lakes / pans and the going gets a bit slower.

After Brandvlei we drive a short distance north on the bitumen of the R27 and then turn off west towards Katkop.

The gravel road is not too good.

There are pans; some of them show signs of salt.

The country now is flat with a few low elevations every so often.

On reaching Halfweg we pass an overpass for the train.

We reach Katkop, a one-house town. (no kidding, it consists of one house and a cross road), and turn north.

The country now changes to glibber plains.

They look pretty with the blackened rock and the yellowish-white grass on it.

Just before reaching Halfweg we pass an overpass for the train.
It is a well-maintained electric railroad. In Halfweg there seems to be some sort of a depot or similar with extra rails and turning points. Everything seems to be new or very well maintained.

We continue on in north-westerly direction and the gravel road turns into a gravel highway. It must be either brand new or just built really good. There is not a single pothole, not a single wash-out for tenths of kilometers! Amazing!

Seeing this road and the new facilities in Halfweg we guess that this is the supply route for goods being brought to this part of the country by rail. Every so often we pass pans with water in them.

The gravel road seems to be raised. Could well be that this area gets hefty rain every so often.

Then it gets REALLY flat.

We feel like in Australia ... the Great Central Road freshly graded. After 48 km of "Highway" we turn north onto the R 358 towards Pofadder. The gravel road also is in pretty good shape, we don't mind at all.

This way we will reach Pofadder before night falls.

We arrive in Pofadder and find the caravan park; all freshly painted and clean.

Then it is time for Ruedi's birthday dinner and a quiet night.

On Monday morning we get organised and manage to get a reservation for the Nossob Camp in the Kgalakgadi Transfrontier Park. But the connection is so bad that we don't manage to get one done for Bitter Pan Camp so we give up.

We will try to get a reservation for a camp on the Botswana side once we have better Internet reception.

We leave Pofadder towards Pella.

We intend to drive the Namaqua 4x4 Trail.

When we reach the turn-off there is a sign that we should show a permit at a controlling officer somewhere. What permit, what checkpoint and where?

As there are no further details we check the map and see that there is also an access to the trail further south through Pella. Pella looks like a town in the middle of northern Africa with palms and red sand all around it.

Then we reach the Namaqua 4x Trail.

There is only a sign with a disclaimer on it, no permit is mentioned here at all.

Perfect - let's go!

While Ruedi lowers the tyre pressure Susi has time to have a look at the surroundings …..

The track first leads us through a gorge in Mt. Groot Pellaberg towards the Gariep River (on some maps the river is called Orange River … ). There is still a bit of water in the gorge but suddenly it all disappears and there is a dry sandy river crossing.

The mountains are stunning.

We drive along a swollen Gariep River. There seems to have been quite a bit of rain here recently, the reeds are partially submerged in the river.

After a while the track heads into the mountains.
Later on there is a turn-off towards the river where we will be able to walk to the river.

We park at the end of the track and start walking. The rocks are quite interesting and we wonder how some of them were created.

Soon it is more canoeling then hiking!

We reach the river. Here too we can see that the water is still above the normal level.

We get back to the track and after a while find ourselves at the beginning of a narrow section through a gully. It is just wide enough to let the OKA through. At the end of the gully there is a large grape farm. The green of the plants looks nice against the red of the mountains.

There is also a Date Plantation. The whole area is covered in yellow flowers; very pretty.

We come past funny looking trees .... later on we find out that we have just spotted our first quiver tree!

Then we reach a freshly graded major gravel road. It looks as if there are no tracks closer to the river in this area.

We turn off towards Witbank. The view of the mountains and down the river in the valley is very pretty.

We are surprised of the size of the settlement. And they even have a visitor centre in Witbank!

We try to follow a track along the river but it is flooded. So we head up into the mountains and find ourselves a spot for the night in the middle of nowhere.
We find a large grasshopper under the tyre and some donkeys come for a visit ... otherwise it is really quiet ......

On Tuesday morning we wake up to another sunny day .... we are getting used to it ..... but the wind makes the 12 °C a bit nippy.

Even though not much more than rocks and dry sand Susi find some flowers.

This one has an interesting seed pot.

Cross-country we get back onto our track and continue on past mountains in various colours. After Abassas the track becomes a bit more challenging, first sandy then rocky.

We come past one of the official camp sites: Groot Melkboot Camp. It is one of the best spots along the river with good access to the water and lots of space. There are also already a few vehicles parked ....

As we drive through a sandy section of the track we see a mountain with dark rocks and from the top a white “cascade” of rocks is “rolling” down into the valley.

Of course we have to investigate what this could be.

This quiver tree is dead but there seems to be a new one growing.

The Weaver Nest is deserted too and we can have a good look at it.

We wonder what the birds were feeding off and where they got their grass from to build the nest ..... this is pure desert!

Or is this maybe the reason why they have left??

We reach Goodhouse. There are many abandoned fields. We can still see the irrigation facilities that were installed ..... but only very few fields are still being cultivated.
Then the track becomes narrow and follows the river. There are many tricky situations and Ruedi has to navigate carefully around the washouts and the tilting sections. It looks as if the river has reached the track recently and they had to fix it again.

Then we reach the Water Pumping station. At first sight it looks as if this could well be the end of our trip in this direction. But then Susi gets out and guides Ruedi through and we get through without a problem even without lowering the tyres .... but not with much clearance either ....

In Henkriesmond they have a power distribution station. No wonder! They have plantations with irrigation and electrical fencing around them to protect the mangoes and other produce they grow. We wonder a bit why they do that out here ... .

As we turn away from the river and back into the mountains the landscape changes quickly and dramatically. It looks like we are passing a large area with water very close to the surface, almost like mount springs / artesian springs. There are Date Palm plantations; some are also protected with electric fences. In the ones that are not protected the Baboons are having a bit of a feed ...... ok, now it all makes sense - they have plenty of water out here! We reach Henkries and are surprised to see a Wastewater Purification Plant. They also seem to have a small power plant here.

Now the track becomes a quite wide gravel road. Probably they have trucks servicing the area.

As we drive along we see a large yellow snake on the road. It looks like a Cobra with its head lifted. Ruedi tries to avoid it but it is difficult ...... when we head back to check we see the snake slider off the road unharmed.

Note:
We checked with Wikipedia later on and found that it was a Cape Cobra (Naja nivea) also known as the "geelslang" (yellow snake). Afrikaans speaking South Africans refer to the Cape Cobra as "koperkapel", mainly because of a rich yellow colour variation. It has the most potent venom of all African cobras.

Then we turn off the road again back onto the track.

We come past some old Mica mines and decide to investigate them.

The paper-like Mica is fascinating.

We also find rocks with traces of other minerals .... and a similar grasshopper we found the other day .... As we walk towards the mine we hear a strange noise, as if something is scratching something in regular intervals. We climb up the hill to have a look and see that at least one mine is still in use.
In So we pack up, head back onto the N7 and start driving back to Johannesburg. Ruedi tries to fix it but without success. The windows cannot be initialised and started. It must have been one of the updates that went wrong.

We choose Pofadder because we know the caravan park from our visit a few days ago and after the dusty and oily job from this morning we really appreciate the hot shower. Ruedi’s PC displays an error message that the system cannot find or has a corrupt hall.dll - that is exactly what we need, a crashed PC!

Before leaving we want to check emails. Ruedi does not understand why the OKA suddenly has such a problem in an area that we drove through this morning without any problems.

We reach a steep section with sand and embedded lose rocks. Susi is instructed to go into the lowest gears, keep the revs slightly up and just let the OKA “walk” up the hill. The OKA does as instructed and bounces uphill and even manages the difficult looking part, no worries.

In the middle of the last steep section suddenly the OKA doesn’t go any further and the motor stalls. Susi starts the engine again and tries to get the OKA going again but all that happens is that the tyres rotate and spit sand and lose rocks everywhere. Looks like we are stuck ....

Susi has had it and hands the keys to Ruedi. She doesn’t like driving anyway and things like this don’t help at all. Ruedi tries all tricks of the trade but he does not get the OKA up the hill either. Even after rolling back to the flat area and with engaging the rear diff lock (which he does with a lot of reluctance as he doesn’t want to risk breaking an axle again ....) he doesn’t get further than half way up.

The OKA just doesn’t make it up the hill, not even nearly as far as Susi got it in the first instance. So we decide to turn around and drive back some 10 km to take the gravel road around the mountains.

We drive up the sandy river bed and the OKA every so often digs itself into the sand a bit. Ruedi does not understand why the OKA suddenly has such a problem in an area that we drove through this morning without any problems.

Then, while take a shortcut through a sandy dry creek we sink in. Having learned our lesson in Tasmania we stop immediately, lower the tyre pressure from gravel to sand and engage front and rear diff locks. That does the job and the OKA drives out of the bog without any problems.

They must have some strange sand in South Africa ... we never had such severe problems in red sand in Australia .... It’s a bit of a worry and we start talking about not being able to do certain sandy tracks in Namibia and Botswana.

We reach the tar again and Ruedi takes the OKA back into 2WD .... and the OKA doesn’t move an inch ....

Hmmmnnnnnnnnn ....

Now a lot makes sense .... the OKA not getting uphill again .... the OKA having problems on the sandy track driving back .... the OKA getting bogged in the sandy river bed ....

Looks like we have bussed something in the rear axle ..... probably when Susi was driving uphill and the OKA suddenly stopped moving .... but we didn’t hear or feel anything strange.

Well, there is nothing else we can do than call the OKA representative Piet Kleynhans in Johannesburg and ask him to arrange with BAE (the manufacturer of the axles) that we can pop in on Monday and they have a look at the axle.

We drive up the sandy river bed and the OKA every so often digs itself into the sand a bit. Ruedi does not understand why the OKA suddenly has such a problem in an area that we drove through this morning without any problems.

Then, while take a shortcut through a sandy dry creek we sink in. Having learned our lesson in Tasmania we stop immediately, lower the tyre pressure from gravel to sand and engage front and rear diff locks. That does the job and the OKA drives out of the bog without any problems.

They must have some strange sand in South Africa ... we never had such severe problems in red sand in Australia .... It’s a bit of a worry and we start talking about not being able to do certain sandy tracks in Namibia and Botswana.

We reach the tar again and Ruedi takes the OKA back into 2WD .... and the OKA doesn’t move an inch ....

Hmmmnnnnnnnnn ....

Now a lot makes sense .... the OKA not getting uphill again .... the OKA having problems on the sandy track driving back .... the OKA getting bogged in the sandy river bed ....

Looks like we have bussed something in the rear axle ..... probably when Susi was driving uphill and the OKA suddenly stopped moving .... but we didn’t hear or feel anything strange.

Well, there is nothing else we can do than call the OKA representative Piet Kleynhans in Johannesburg and ask him to arrange with BAE (the manufacturer of the axles) that we can pop in on Monday and they have a look at the axle.

We then head south and in Steinkopf, the first town we come through, we stop to exchange the front locking hub with the rear hubs so we can turn the back axle in to a lazy axle and drive to Johannesburg with only front-wheel drive.

Sounds familiar? Sure, we already did it in Tasmania and in Bachelor in Australia, no worries!

Overnight the temperature drops to 3°C. We wake up to a sunny but very windy Thursday. In the morning we exchange the lockers. It is very unpleasant to work outside and we are glad when we finish.

Before leaving we want to check emails. Ruedi’s PC displays an error message that the system cannot find or has a corrupt hall.dll - that is exactly what we need, a crashed PC!

It must have been one of the updates that went wrong. Ruedi tries to fix it but without success. Windows cannot be initialised and started. So we pack up, head back onto the N7 and start driving back to Johannesburg.

In Springbok we change to the N14 and drive to Pofadder, where we stop for the night. We choose Pofadder because we know the caravan park from our visit a few days ago and after the dusty and oily job from this morning we really appreciate the hot shower.

On Friday, April 29, the weather looks as if a bad weather front is coming in. After a while the little radio receivers we use to communicate between the driver cab and the back section in such situation sounds and Ruedi announces that he has managed to fix the problem. The best configuration had been deleted. Great!

The more we get towards the Gariep or Orange River the better the weather gets. We decide to devote to the Augrabies Falls National Park.

The water thunders down in brown cascades.

The recent flooding destroyed some of the viewing platforms. There must have been an incredible amount of water coming through here. The marks are still very visible ....
The engine overheating and we assist with plenty of water to refill the radiator. We stop to see if we can help. In the late afternoon we see a Toyota Kluger at the edge of the road with the bonnet open. Tom gives us a large package of frozen meat, beacon and garlic butter as a present and invites us to stay at his place, which is about 350 km towards Johannesburg. They have organised a mechanic who is already driving down some 100 km from Kuruman to assist them.

Once in Olifantshoek we say good-bye to Tom, Sean and the boys. The OKA pulls the extra weight on front wheel drive only and does not complain a bit. So we decide to tow them 50 km into Olifantshoek which works remarkable well. The engine just does not cool down even though all seems to be working. Shortly after we find them again on the side of the road. Some more water is required. But we have not even started the OKA as we see the vehicle pull over again. Luckily the engine starts again and they drive off.

Near Sishen we come past some large iron ore mines. The whole area seems to be one mine after the other.

At Kuruman we turn south onto the R31 and shortly after onto the R372. It is a major gravel road and in pretty good shape. But every so often we can see signs that it must have been pretty wet out here; the road still a bit too humid and large sheets of water along the gravel road. Halfway through it we reach a “road closed” sign but it looks as everybody would drive around it. We call Tom to find out what his opinion is. He recommends that we should turn around as he had gone through the gravel road just recently and the mud had been very bad and without 4WD he would definitely not recommend driving it.

So, we head all the way back to the tar and drive to Vryburg on the N14. Then we head south on the N12. It is a very dangerous tar road, narrow, with animals and maniacs on the road and many constructions sites. We are happy when we reach Hartswater and after a bit of searching we also find Tom.

We can stay in front of his garage and have a very pleasant evening together with his family. We hear that the mechanic that had driven down to have a look at Tom’s Toyota in Olifantshoek had found that the cylinder head gasket had blown. The mechanic had towed the heavy Toyota with his small Isuzu Bakkie (a UTE) 350 km to Hartswater. They had arrived home at 2:30 AM in the morning.

On Sunday morning too soon it is time for us to leave the hospitality and fun of Tom and his family. We would have so much more to talk about…. Thanks so much for having us!

Near Karamas we come past some large iron ore mines. The sky is still overcast and we want to get on our way to Johannesburg.

Thanks so much for having us!!

We drive to BAE and have a discussion of our situation.

We reach Upington and fill up diesel. At the petrol station Ruedi sees that the left side hub has lost its lid. We had not been able to really tighten a screw that is supposed to prevent the drive shaft of sliding too much into the gear box. This screw had now managed to turn itself loose and destroyed the locking hub. Somehow the hub had also locked itself into 4x4 meaning that the broken off drive shaft had been turning all the time with the tyre. Ruedi takes the remaining parts of the hub out and is able to disable the 4x4 mode.

Then he applies a fix to the hole and we continue on driving. It is currently not our luckiest time…. In the late afternoon we see a Toyota Kluger at the edge of the road with the bonnet open. We stop to see if we can help.

As it is already late and dark it is hard to find a bush camp especially because we cannot go off the road in 2WD front drive. But we find a B&B where the gate is open, so we drive in hoping to get a place to park the OKA for the night. There is nobody home so we set up camp and have a peaceful night.

On Saturday morning there is still nobody home at the B&B place so we leave. This was a cheap night. We continue east on the N14. We drive to BAE and have a discussion of our situation. We are glad that there is not too much traffic on the road as to overtake the trucks becomes a major issue if you never know if there are potholes that have to be avoided by either of the parties!

The camp ground is really pretty and a paradise for children. For all us that matters is that it has space for us, power and we can have a quiet evening.

On Monday Susi takes advantage of the caravan Park’s infrastructure: a washing machine with HOT water! So for the majority of the caravan parks we had visited had only offered wash-tubs and very few had washing machines with cold water. This is only the second caravan park so far where we have found having washing machines with hot water. The rest of the day is spent with PC-work.

Then the best part of the day comes: The caravan park has a heated pool which is open in the late afternoon and evening. We have to walk back to the OKA quickly because as soon as the sun sets the temperature drops quite rapidly to as low as 6°C. But the OKA displays itself. Again they seem to be caused by the mine trucks.

On the drive there to Potchefstroom via N12 and then R54, R42 and R557 we experience some amazing potholes! Thanks so much for having us!!

On Sunday morning too soon it is time for us to leave the hospitality and fun of Tom and his family. We would have so much more to talk about…… We head back to our caravan park and set up camp for the next few days.
The swim in the heated pool is very relaxing today...... there is nothing we can do but wait .... so why not enjoy it .... and finish this journal?
And this is the end of it.