

Knysner February 2007

One Wednesday evening in December at the North Star I was contemplating the coming winter & the almost empty glass in my hand when Pete Hopkins mentioned that he was going to South Africa to ride with his mates from the Cape Town Triumph Owners on their Knysner Run, I had always promised myself to join him one year as it sounded a wonderful experience, hey wasn't I going to be made redundant in January? Yippee! I'm coming with you I blurted, shame I had the last drop of beer in my mouth. Now I don't know if Pete wanted me along & perhaps he was too polite to say no but - - 1st February I arrived with suitcase in one hand & marmalade sandwiches in the other, I was at Heathrow's T3. Now I'm a firm believer that if a journey on an aircraft lasts longer than three hours it's not worth going. Let's see. My horror at finding myself in the middle seat in the middle row next to a tall American with very pointy elbows confirmed my worst fears; all I can say is thank goodness Virgin has a very comprehensive free in flight entertainment consul for each passenger. The 12 hour flight with elbows & Pirates of the Caribbean 2 eventually ended & the queue for Immigration passed we were met by Nevil & Avelon, Kerry & Alan. Pete & friend Ivan were well known but I was welcomed just as warmly, a good start to my fortnight. I was to stay with Nevil & Avalon at their Bungalow in Sun Valley, Pete & Ivan just a few miles up the road with Alan & Kerry in Fishhoek. After a snooze, I showered & then changed into more appropriate clothing as I had gone from mid winter to mid summer in 12 hours. Nevil led me out into the garden to the garage, the door opened & there before me was a treasure trove. Over the back a red BMC mini, Nevils early sixties Daytona & there in front of my eyes stood a silver 56 Thunderbird, this I was told was going to be mine for the duration. I couldn't believe my luck. Meeting up with the others at Kerry & Alan's we spent the afternoon around the swimming pool catching up with the years scandals & gossip funnily enough mostly motorcycle orientated. Oh & Alan's garage, I think I counted 7 Triumphs ranging from 50's Thunderbirds to a T150

Saturday morning we headed for town as that afternoon we were going to meet some of the others that were riding with us to Knysner. Banking done we headed to the nearest supermarket & loaded up the car with a few beers for that afternoons braai (BBQ to us). Kerry & Alan laid on a sumptuous lunch & new arrivals joined us round the pool, hands were shaken & bottles opened. Now a conversation I was listening to I feel I need to repeat here When we talk here about wildlife in the garden we mean the odd fox or blue-tits & other tweeting things or neighbours cats digging the garden, this conversation was about having a cobra at the bottom of his garden that he had befriended. only to be confronted one day by an angry neighbour complaining that the cobra had killed & swallowed his pedigree dog, and the time he left a window open & on returning home seeing monkeys running up the garden path with his clothing & one with a bottle of his finest whisky tucked under its arm. I think I'll stick to foxes thanks.

Sunday morning. & as Nevil pushed the bikes from his garage the roar of Brit twins filled the air as the others arrived. We were riding to Simonstown for a gentle warm up for the trip to Knysner later that week. One kick and the 650 was growling smoothly, well the ride was gorgeous, names like Kommetjie, Misty Cliffs, then on towards Cape Point dropping down into Simonstown to meet up with the Capetown VMCC, a lovely Scott & a very shiny Ariel Square 4, also a Sunbeam among other finery

were already parked. I turned the t'bird into a gap & then struggled with the gear lever to find neutral watched by a couple of amused gents from the VMCC. Realising that the footbrake was never going to do the trick I swiftly changed to my other foot turned off and walked away trying not to look too embarrassed.

We joined them in the Quarterdeck Restaurant for brunch. At this time I realised that Pete was missing. I had seen Alan riding in the opposite direction at one stage unknown to me he was looking for him but he disappeared for the rest of the morning. I became used to Alan's old yellow open faced helmet as I could keep an eye out for him on the following journey later that week I remember thinking that it's age would make it in a crash about as protective as a flower pot on his head. Simonstown is a naval base if you didn't know with some very fine Victorian buildings. Also a large bronze statue of a Great Dane named Just Nuisance, The statue was paid for by the Royal Navy after its death as this dog was known by all & had helped numerous drunken British sailors back to their ships.

Arriving back in Fishhoek Pete turned up from his solitary ride, he said he had stopped for fuel but we hadn't noticed so remembering places from earlier visits he had ridden quiet happily on his own. Alan muttered something about buying an extending dog lead. During the week there were many local excursions & I even managed a couple of days in Cape Town visiting a relative.

Thursday arrived I was going to ride with Nevil & Keith (a first class engineer) & his wife Barbara joined the ladies in the car. Numerous Brit bikes arrived, ages ranged from a 52 T'bird to a Hinckley Thruxton. Our first stop was Summerset West where we met up with the VMCC and about 100 of us took the coast road along the R44 through Rooilsbaai & Kleinmond stopping at Bredasdorp for tea later that afternoon Reaching our night stopover destination Swellendam a nice holiday village with comfortable chalets. & with all such bike rides on such machines spanners came out and the merry sound of fettling ensued. That evening I was introduced to Graham Cork. "Corky" is lucky enough to have a home in SA as well as the UK. He had arranged a Braai at the local airdrome. Swellendam Airdrome is the oldest in SA in the bar hangs a signed photograph of the intrepid aviator Amy Johnson. Soon the glasses were filled & the braas lit. Corky had pushed his little aircraft out of its hangar & was flying those willing off towards the mountain, I was just about to ask "can I have a go" when I noticed very large black clouds over the mountains facing us & changed my mind. The meal was made up of fish with names I hadn't encountered. Yellow Tail, Kingklip, & Cape Salmon they were delicious. The night ended reasonably early (I think it did but I was a little blurred by then), due to our early start next morning, the Land Rovers headed back to camp I can't remember how many were in the back of the one I was in but my camera went off & the picture shows a lot of legs all over the place, there was also a passenger on the roof. & wondered if there were lions about, we reached camp & the legs were still hanging over the back window so no excitement there so turned off my camera.

Friday morning there was a slight rain that lasted on & off as we rode the R66 to Troudau Pass a beautiful canyon where we stopped for pictures, at this point the rain started to fizzle out. We passed Ostrich farms & the famous pub named Ronnie's sex shop I think the owner had called it that to drag passers by in but it was No sex please we're British this time. The 180k soon covered we stopped for early lunch at ?? The husband & wife team cooked beautifully for the 60 odd that had turned up. There I met the Club President Lawson Gunn; He was very ill & had been for some time, but was helped tirelessly by his son. ? Lawson was determined to make the journey albeit by car. This sadly was his last trip as he died in April.

Starting out again towards Ladysmith I managed to find myself alone, no chance of getting lost unless I fancied some sand riding. About twenty miles had passed when I came across a lone bike pulled up on the side of the road, it was the Indian Enfield. The owner was contemplating the bits of piston that had blown out through the silencer. He seemed cheerful enough and the recovery vehicles would take him to our destination & sent me on my way telling me to turn right at the crossroads in 40 miles or so. The temperature was now rising as we headed inland, Corky flashed past me on his T140V so I gave the T'bird a bit of throttle. As I headed up a hill & cresting the top I was a little surprised to find the throttle grip although still in my hand was detached from the handlebars Oooh ! I was also more than glad to see that the road kept in a straight line, glancing down I noticed the speedometer needle jump from 60 mph to 120 within a blinking of an eye & stick there. What had I done? Nevil will kill me if he sees that. Twiddling with the cable at the carburettor end the bike slowed to around 40 for ten minutes or so then came to a halt. Getting off the bike & removing my helmet & surveyed the barren landscape, the temperature was around 40c & I had visions of tumbleweed blowing across the landscape & was that a cow's skull over there? Suddenly the noise of bikes reached my ears & Triumphs & BSA's shot past, riders giving friendly waves realising the breakdown trucks weren't far behind, but I didn't have to wait for them as Nevil & Keith pulled up followed by the wives in the car. Putting the cable back was a three handed affair & Nevil didn't take long to sort it out. Starting off I followed behind like a naughty schoolboy.

Oudtshoorn with its acres of hop fields passed we turned back towards the coast in the direction of George. Stopping to take refreshments from the boot of the car & me to inspect my strangely swollen lower lip, it was so swollen that as I drank from the bottle the water poured out of my mouth. This did cause some alarm & quite a bit of amusement for the others. Back on the move we dropped down the twisty road of the Outeniqua Pass the weather deteriorated but Nevil kept up a hard pace to follow, I then remembered that he had been a racer back in his younger days & my, did he handle the Daytona well. Stopping at George due to one of the ladies staying there the rain gathered pace. Now I had purchased a Jacket made by Berring this lets in air but has elbow & shoulder protection & off the Internet trousers made by Weiss with the same qualities, the jacket has a waterproof top in a pouch but the trouser waterproofs were in the boot of the car Bother said I . As we reached Knysner I contemplated my unwanted foot bath that my boots had become. Through the town we reached our destination Ashmead Resort with very comfortable chalets perched by the waters edge. Five others shared with me & a jolly crew we were, I must mention the two Johns both ex-pats & wonderful companions. That evening we decided to head for town & chose a restaurant called Ocean Basket. I ordered a plate of Yellow Tail & later in a pub I noticed my top lip swelling. Blimey I was beginning to look like a fish. Needless to say no more fish for me (as I write I still have the allergy & have found it's not only fish that sets it off).

Saturday we had been invited to show our bikes in town & the sun shone for us. The bar owner handed out free beer to all 100 plus. Just like here (he-he). Later the clouds returned so we headed back to camp & to get ready for the evenings Club dinner. Seated at the table wearing our very nice V neck shirts commemorating the gathering I was more than glad to see fish not on the menu. As the wine flowed we listened to a very funny but un pc MC, prizes for this & that handed out then when the bottles finally emptied we tottered off to bed. Sunday awoke to the sound of rain & didn't it rain. Opening the door I was amazed to see an eagle owl perched above my head. It blinked at me & I blinked at her. Rubbing my eyes the owl was still there, so it wasn't

alcohol induced. Sunday was a bit of a wash out; in the morning we were driven to Wilderness to a member's house to join them at their AGM where we had a chance to thank them all for their hospitality. The afternoon we sat watching the rain sheeting down & a third rate American film on the telly while downing a few beers. Yep home from home.

Mondays start was early as we had been warned that at 7; am the road out was to be closed for an hour or two for maintenance. At least this time except for feet I was fully waterproofed. The journey back being direct was half a day so the countryside whizzed by, & soon the showers were left behind. The Thunderbird making a very nice job of it, so very little traffic compared to home. I was enjoying it so much that I didn't notice Alan's yellow helmet pulled up at a café, so sped on in search of the already stopped. All too soon Cape Town could be seen in the distance, dropping down the Sir Lowery Pass I overtook some of the modern cars that had passed me on the straight. More twisty fun until hitting the N2 that's when the throttle came away once more but I managed somehow to catch the cable & nurse the dear old Thunderbird & between us made the journey over the mountain to my destination in Sun Valley. My last full day had arrived so we had one last ride to Simonstown the long way round but this time stopping off for photo calls. Pulling up at the side of the road as a troop of monkeys walked by I was horrified to find my camera's memory was full so I will just have to go back.

That evening Pete, Ivan & I took Nevil, Avalon, Alan, Kerry Keith & Barbara, out to dinner King prawns, pay for one plateful then eat as much as you like. Thought's of allergy forgotten I peaked at three helpings this was followed by ice cream liquors. The friendly but somewhat camp waiter arrived with all 9 glasses on a platter raised above his shoulder, on passing down the first glass the rest tipped delivering a multi coloured heap on Keith's head, my hands twitched for Pete's camera but good manners & fear of a punch on the nose stopped me, but all was taken in good humour Keith being given a free shirt from the management.

My last day arrived, packing done we drove to Alan's for a chat round the pool me envious of Pete & Ivan having two more weeks' holiday, all too soon it was off to the airport with Nevil & Avalon My farewells made with lump in throat At least the journey home was by the window. Was the 12 hour fight worth it? As they say, I'll be back



