

Travel report from Des and Lotti Kelly

Hello all Note that some of this email is in the present tense and some in the past. This is because I didn't continue writing until we were back in Switzerland and for quite some time at that.



Many of you folks might have thought that you will never hear from us again. Well this is not so. We have now set off on another African trip. This trip is rather different from all others We boarded a cargo vessel in Antwerp and took our Landcruiser with us in the hull. Previously we flew to Africa and used vehicles that we owned in Africa or rented there. At this point in time we do not know how long we will be in Africa. Roughly we think that a minimum of six months and a maximum of twelve months should suffice. It is quite possible that we will drive all the way back to Switzerland. The route will depend on the active civil wars in Africa and the Middle East, not last, the effect of the Bush doctrine in the Middle East.

The most important factor will be our health. Should serious problems occur we would ship the vehicle back to Europe and fly home to Switzerland. The vessel is an Italian built 20 thousand ton single screw freighter which was used in Italy as a naval supply ship before being sold to a German shipping line. Our cruising speed is maximum 16 Knots and the total length of the voyage is about 11'700 km.



Let us go back to square one.

After some red tape applied by the local Swiss traffic authorities I finally removed the necessary strengthened rear springs and the vehicle was classed as roadworthy. The additional leaves are in the car and will be re-inserted in Cape Town. Thanks Marc! Traveling aboard a cargo vessel is difficult as departure date is affected by many factors. Firstly there must be space in the port to discharge the cargo. The amount and type of cargo discharged then determines the time required for loading. The finer adjustments are to acquire a pilot to leave a port or wait at locks because of heavy port traffic. In some ports it is also necessary to wait for high tide before one can sail out through the locks.

We experienced a delay of two weeks from the initial booking to sailing day. This caused us to visit our friends in Immenstadt, South Germany a week before we planned to leave home and go back home for the final packing. Thanks for the hospitality Petra and Peter. It was then that it turned really cold in Switzerland and Germany. It was guesswork to decide when to head for Antwerp. We stretched the trip out to a few days and made our first stop in Ulm with Birgit and Hopp-Sing. Thanks for your hospitality too. From Ulm we only drove to Asselheim in the Pfalz wine lands and spent the night in a very pleasant hotel. The next afternoon we reached Antwerp where we spent 2 nights in a huge hotel in Beveren outside the city.

Although we will sleep in our Landcruiser in Africa, it was so full of second hand clothing for a project in Cape Town that we were forced to use hotels. We were warned often in Holland and Belgium that our vehicle would be broken into should we leave it unattended on the street at night. There was no confirmation that the ship "Diamond Land" so we moved to a hotel in the middle of the city used by visiting seamen. The forecourt was monitored by cameras and we felt safe there. When our ship arrived was when the trouble started. As a passenger there are few problems but having a vehicle to export was a very complicated procedure with many people involved.

This feature is advertised on the web but we were left to our own devices and even given addresses of shipping company agents which no longer handled the shipping line business for almost a year. Should we ever do such a thing again we would ask many more questions before signing a contract. The main problem was to coordinate our passage and that of the vehicle without having to leave the vehicle unattended overnight. Then of course the local authorities all required their copies of the vehicle documentation which had already been sent to the forwarding agent in Hamburg before we even left Switzerland.



The port authorities sent us to Customs with our carnet which Customs rejected. The man at the counter answered all my carnet. Finally someone not mentally retarded came to the counter and told me I had to wait because my carnet had been sent to Brussels by telefax. I have traveled intensively in Southern Africa using a carnet but have never yet had as many problems as I had in Antwerp. Finally Customs signed the Carnet after I had once again photocopied passport and vehicle registration papers.

The voyage was very pleasant with a Polish crew. Captain and Officers could all make themselves understood in English and most had a very good sense of humor. The first port of call was Lisbon where we only spent a few hours. As I write this we are approaching Walvisbaai on the Namibian coastline and the sea is calm as it has been for entire voyage up to now. After a short stop in Walvisbaai we take course for Cape Town which requires another 48 hours.

Based on current information we are scheduled to reach Cape Town on December 21 at 22:00 hours where unloading starts immediately. Cape Town and Durban are very bad for theft by stevedores which probably means that I will spend the night in the vehicle to prevent it being broken into and have everything stolen.



Of course the inevitable happened. On the leg from Walvisbaai to Cape Town we experienced a strong current. This was the Benguela current which flows up the West coast of Africa. This delayed us further and we only docked in Cape Town harbour at midday on December 22. The next bad news was the fact that South African Customs would close for Christmas that afternoon and only return to work on December 27. The worst case would be to camp in the harbour until the Customs inspectors return to work. Well Adrian, our forwarding agent and a friend of many year phoned Customs about 40 times and organized that an inspector would wait for us in an office in the city. We only cleared Customs about 7:00 PM that evening and drove to our friend Audrey in Hout Bay, a suburb on the Southern Peninsular.

Des and Charlotte Kelly January 5, 2006

Once in Cape Town we took the second hand clothing we had on board to an organization we have been supporting for years. Among other activities they run a care centre and Kindergarten for 160 under privileged children. There we donated 20 cases of seedless grapes to enlighten the lives of these children. A short visit to friends on the north side of the valley after which we moved to a campsite which had been our home for a good many years. It was after we rejected the house we built in 1995 that we became totally mobile and lived in a caravan on Chapman's Peak Caravan Farm. The owners and their children are still very firm friends.

We have spent many years on campsites and as usual we met a large number of interesting people. Suddenly out of the blue I developed serious pains in my back and resorted to pain tablets while waiting for an appointment with the neuro surgeon who operated on my back 10 years ago. A scan showed nothing and our trip up through Africa by road became impossible. I was absolutely unable to change a wheel on our vehicle and often required 2 men to lift me slowly out of a chair. We were then to be flown back to Switzerland by our repatriation insurance. Being only a few days drive from my family in Durban I asked John, the neuro surgeon, what he thought about a short family visit before the flight back to Europe.

He thought it quite possible if I took it slowly which I did. We drove up the Garden Route to Oudtshoorn, an ostrich farming area in South Africa before driving round the north of Lesotho and down through the Drakensberg mountains into Natal. Bergville, Estcourt, Pietermaritzburg then Durban was the route we took. Some 40 km down the south coast of Durban is Amanzimtoti. The name means “Sweet Waters” and this is where my brother and my niece live.

Amanzimtoti is surrounded by sugar plantations on three sides and the fourth side being the Indian Ocean. The only discord in the family was the fact that Charlotte wished to follow the winter Olympics on television and my family were all rugby fanatics – not really unusual for South Africa. So as not to return to Cape Town by the same route, we drove up the north coast towards Kruger Park.

On the way we stopped at Hluhluwe, a game reserve which has played an important part in saving the white (actually wide mouthed) rhino from extinction. Many of the growing population were placed in game reserves all over Southern Africa. In Hluhluwe near the gate an elephant strode on to the road and came straight to us. I switched the engine off and waited. Within seconds he was in front of us, tied his trunk in a knot then laid it on the front of the vehicle for a few seconds before he began to inspect a front wheel.

This whole procedure lasted less than a minute. Charlotte sat about 10cm from the elephant when he inspected the wheel. I am sure that he was only inquisitive but Charlotte thinks otherwise. By this time we had received an SMS from Swiss friends who were paying a short visit to Kruger Park so we made our way north.

We spent three very pleasant days in the park with our friends before going west to Pretoria finally on our way back to Cape Town. We stayed with friends on the east of Pretoria living in a flat placed at our disposal. At about five o'clock the second morning I looked out of the kitchen window to discover that our vehicle was missing. Although it was parked some ten metres from us we neither heard the door being drilled open nor the fact that the vehicle was pushed fifty metres away from our window.

The thieves had cut open the fence as they were unable to open the electric gate to the property. They were all set to push the vehicle on to the street when the steering column lock snapped in. It was while they were destroying the steering column to unlock it that I woke. They must have seen light and fled. When the garages started work I got busy on the phone. I phoned three garages until I had some cooperation.

I was told “grey import-we can do nothing” and “a foreign vehicle – we are not permitted to touch it. Finally one garage tried to help but stumbled over the fact that my vehicle was unknown in their database. There I was with a damaged vehicle and no spares. The steering column damage was such that I could not drive the 1600km to Cape Town.

I phoned Toyota Switzerland from whom I purchased the vehicle and was supplied with the part number of the major casting at top of the steering column. This part was of course the same in South Africa and I then waited over a week for the part to be transported from Durban where it had come sea to Midrand, Toyota's central spares department, and then to Pretoria about 30km west of the city.

The casting was not complete as was promised so I inquired in Switzerland again. This time I was connected to the spares department and told that Toyota Switzerland was not permitted to give part numbers on the telephone. Of course I was angry. I cannot understand the stupid policy of a company with the perfect vehicle for a trip through Africa.

I was left with no alternative other than shipping the vehicle back to Europe. Toyota South Africa would not work on my vehicle and I replaced the top casting myself. My TCS Carnet wasn't understood and the vehicle was still considered “grey import” Because of the missing components I could only start and stop the engine by

means of a Swiss pocket knife. Without an ignition key I had to prevent the new steering column lock from engaging while driving by blocking it in position with silicon. Unfortunately I must have turned the pocket knife (key substitute) too far when leaving Pretoria and the starter motor lasted 600km to Kimberly before it burnt out. Once again no spares. I did not even try but went to a farm mechanic who solved the problem with a starter motor from another vehicle. The remaining 1000km was driven in two days and uneventful. South of Kimberly we stopped at Langberg.

About 20km from Kimberly on the right you will find a very pleasant stop-over. Our next stop was in the Karoo National Park south of Beaufort West. Also very pleasant accommodation with a restaurant and pleasant drives up into the hills. Once in Cape Town we packed the vehicle for shipping, purchased air tickets and organized the shipping of the vehicle.

We left Cape Town on April 3 business class to protect my back. The air tickets and most of the vehicle transport cost was covered by our “fly back” insurance. Once again many thanks to Intertours of Winterthur Insurance for their support. Thinking our problems to be over we set off to fetch our vehicle in Basel a month later. To our dismay we discovered that our Open Top Container with 25cm Overheight Fee had been damaged.

Somewhere on the trip between Cape Town and Basel another container had been placed on top of our container and damaged the roof of our vehicle. Although my money was taken in Cape Town nobody felt responsible for the damage. Finally the marine insurance company accepted the blame on behalf of the shipping company. As I am still being treated for back pains and living on pain tablets after six months we have decided to sell the Landcruiser and concentrate on Europe with a VW camping bus. We still have plenty to see here.

Cheers Des and Charlotte

PS The latest situation is that after a month pain free, the pains are returning (Jan 6,2007). Acupuncture appears to be the solution but it requires time.