

South Africa World Conference Tour 2017

(through the eyes of Graham and Heather Lindsay)

Graham and I flew to Sydney on Good Friday where we met with Rick McDouall. On Saturday, we boarded our Qantas flight for Johannesburg and our South African adventure began.

We arrived in Johannesburg at 5 o'clock on Easter Saturday afternoon, breezed through customs and were met by our smiling driver Justice, who took charge of us and our luggage and drove us to the Protea Hotel Balalaika, dispensing information as we went. Efficient staff booked us in and we had a pleasant dinner that night in the hotel restaurant. The hotel was a sprawling older style complex, very comfortable and with enough gardens and space that it was hard to believe we were in the middle of any city, let alone one with as many millions as Joburg has.

We had a quick trip to Sandton Mall on Sunday morning to buy a phone, because my Telstra Travelsim didn't want to work. When we got back to the motel, there were several market stalls along the footpath so we bought a few souvenirs from people from Soweto. Sunday afternoon saw the Victoria Falls contingent arrive and a meet and greet was held on Sunday evening – we hadn't seen most of the people since USA in 2014 so it was like a family reunion.

Monday morning saw us embark on the tour via a luxurious bus and with the inimitable Henni as our driver. Henni could get that bus anywhere a bus that size could possibly fit – a gentle giant and a bus driver *par excellence!*

Johannesburg is very spread out, and a city of total contrasts. It has the most green space of any city, and the buildings vary from new modern commercial towers to the lovely old ones from previous centuries, and the very basic dwellings of places like Soweto. Razor wire and electric fences are very much in evidence – a real culture shock for someone from the bush in Queensland where you can still leave the keys in your vehicles and the door open.

The country was relatively flat at first, not unlike inland Australia with its gum trees (they have become quite a problem for South Africa). I was amazed by the amount of corn and the paddocks filled with round bales of hay (just shows my lack of knowledge of agriculture in South Africa – I was expecting lots of open grazing and not a lot of cropping).

First port of call was the impressive, family owned, **Karan feedlot** with a capacity of 140000 head. There are 2000 staff; they process 1500 head per day. The cattle average 120 days on feed and are fed three times per day. We saw the feed plant where the mix of ingredients and distribution are all computerized. Tractors pull the feed wagons (lots of female drivers) and the amount of feed consumed by each pen is all monitored by computer. Karan uses approx. 1000 tonnes of silage every 5/6 days. The pens hold around 120 head and are checked by pen walkers twice daily. There is no dehorning or castrating, but poll cattle are preferred. The minimum weight for entry to the feedlot is 160 kg; average daily weight gain is 1.6 kg in summer and 1.4 in winter. Death rate is less than 1%. Karan will use at least

160000 tonnes of silage this year. I personally don't like feedlots, but this one was extremely neat and clean, the cattle were in excellent condition and the management protocols are first rate – maybe a reflection of family rather than company ownership?

Lunch at **Tweling** followed; too much wonderful food, including excellent steak from Karan feedlot, supplied by Dan and his helpers, including some traditional South African fare. I liked the pap (ground cooked maize) and the hot chutney that accompanied it – wasn't so keen on the twisted sister pastries (obviously my personal taste as there were quite a few of our party who really enjoyed them).

Back on the bus and off to **Dan and Hannelie Kriek's Bellary Stud** in its lovely hilltop setting with a view right to the Drakensberg's. The cattle were well presented in pens or held by staff in small paddocks around the yards so that we could wander at will. A guessing competition was held to see who could pick the young bull with the largest eye muscle. Much to Rick McDouall's delight, it was one with Cadman blood. Dan explained the climatic conditions his cattle experience, and they certainly do well to cope as well as they obviously do. Only the young bulls are supplementary fed, everything else lives in the paddock. Ticks can be a problem at times. The Bellary cattle are exactly what are required for their climatic conditions; medium sized, quiet natured and easy doing, capable of looking after themselves whatever conditions they experience. I particularly liked some of the young heifers.

Back on the bus; already behind time – what a surprise – for the final leg of the day which ended at our hotel in **Clarens** after dark. We could just see that there were some quite stunning mountains along the way.

Tuesday

I have a photo taken early on Tuesday morning to prove that there was frost. The view from the hotel was quite spectacular; no wonder it is a favourite holiday/weekend destination. We bussed to Harrismith where we changed into smaller buses to take us onto the high veld to our studs for the day. On the way, we passed through the magnificent mountains of the Golden Gate Reserve and saw our first African wildlife in the form of eland, springbok, blesbok and zebra.

Stop 1; Magpella South Devon Stud and Afrikaner Stud. (Jan and Marizelle Van Niekerk)

We were warmly welcomed to Magpella Stud where the sisters-in-law run a South Devon Stud and an Afrikaner stud respectively. Again, the cattle were either penned or held close to the house by staff so we could wander at will and inspect/take photos. As at Bellary, there are tough climatic conditions that the cattle must endure, and as at Bellary, they do a wonderful job of coping. The difference between the Afrikaners and the South Devons was very apparent, but the cross of the two breeds is a very successful one. Again, I thought the young heifers particularly good.

More delicious food was supplied for morning tea and it was back on the buses to travel to **Arthur de Villiers** renowned **Arcadia Bonsmara Stud** where we were treated to yet another delicious lunch and a very interesting and enlightening talk by Arthur both on the origins of

his stud and his breeding philosophy and future direction, as well as his thoughts on cattle breeding/recording in general. It was particularly interesting for us to have Arthur freely acknowledge that his father used a strong South Devon influence in the beginning of the Bonsmara breeding programme (on the urging of Prof Bonsma himself), and to credit that influence for the quality of his cattle. Then it was off to the cattle yards to inspect firstly the cows and calves, and then some bulls which had been sold at the annual sale the week prior but were still waiting for delivery. As usual, we were running late which meant we had to view some more of Arthurs cattle from the bus, but all agreed that Arthur is both passionate and knowledgeable and it was time well spent. As we live in a tick free area it was interesting to hear Arthur say that he leaves just enough ticks on his cattle to ensure continued immunity from the tick-borne diseases. Back to **Clarens** for the night.

Wednesday

After a leisurely breakfast, we boarded the bus accompanied by a local historian/tour guide, for the trip to **Bloemfontein**. We were passing through some of the countryside which had seen bitter fighting during the Boer war, and had a photo opportunity at Surrender Hill. Our guide also gave us plenty of information about the country of Lesotho along whose boundary we were travelling. Lesotho is a mountainous, landlocked country which supplies water to South Africa. It is also a large diamond mining area now.

The country was initially a continuation of the spectacular sandstone formations, but gradually gave way to a gentler landscape. Maize, soybeans and sunflowers as well as apples and cherries are the main crops.

On arrival at Bloemfontein we were hosted by the Stud Book for lunch, followed by an interesting session with different speakers who explained the set-up of the SA Stud Book and how it operates.

After checking in to our hotel for the night we were off (on the bus) to the Spur Steak House for dinner. This is a chain of Steakhouses, and due to the proximity to the university, my guess was that many of the table staff were students. Angela Smaridge was treated to an exuberant version of Happy Birthday and then a typical African dance. When our bus declined to start, we walked the short distance back to the hotel escorted by the staff in their own inimitable fashion.

Thursday

By bus to Boshof where we transferred to a local school bus for the trip to **Barrie and Gielie van Zyl's Johstep South Devon Stud**. Graham and I felt quite at home on the dusty, corrugated road with wide open country either side, although the English in particular couldn't see any beauty in the countryside. To them it was dry, brown and desolate – to us it reminded us of around Winton in CW Qld – excellent cattle country as long as it gets some rain. The cattle were in excellent condition and obviously handle the conditions well. The van Zyl's run 500 commercial and 60 stud cows. The stud cows were a very even line and the SD bulls we saw there were very well put together. There is usually a 2 – 3 month

calving period – a bit out of kilter at present due to the drought. Temperatures can range from -18 to 45 degrees (that is the biggest difference to Western Qld; we don't have the cold) so the cattle are obviously very adaptable. At the yards near the house were the 18-month-old bulls which were a quite impressive little group, and some commercial cows with a strong Brahman content. Lunch was eaten on the lawn around the homestead, this time a selection of cold meats and salad with African buns (called fat cakes (translation from Afrikaans)) which were very moreish. I've found the recipe and am going to have a go at making them.

Back on the school bus for the trip into **Kimberley**, past the flamingos on the shallow lake, to the famous 'Big Hole' where we were treated to the history of the diamond industry, followed by a brief trip into an old underground mine tunnel (for those who wished) and then a look in the vault at real and replica diamonds. I had no idea there was such a colour variation in Diamonds. Although the very large diamonds are undoubtedly impressive and obscenely valuable, I don't like them – way too big! Back on our own bus for the short trip to Kalahari Lodge for the night where we were treated to a typical African Braai (barbeque) for dinner in a lovely setting around the pool.

Friday

Early start as we had a long day ahead of us. Driving through a variety of country with a short lunch break at Aliwal North on the Orange River. The country was open for the first part but as we got closer to Cathcart, we were back into big imposing mountains and fertile valleys. We arrived at **Cathcart** in time to meet our hosts prior to yet another excellent meal at the Country Club, after a brief but very interesting talk by Stephen Basset who is an expert in Rock Art. In Cathcart, we were very privileged to be hosted by local families – a huge undertaking as there were approximately 25 different couples/parties to be accommodated. These wonderful people not only invited us into their homes for two nights, but they transported us to our venues for two consecutive days, organised for our washing to be done and generally took us into their family. Hopefully there have been some long-term friendships as a result of this generosity. I know we talked until 11 o'clock or later both nights with Stephen and Janelle, and we could still have been talking two weeks later had there been time – so much to discuss!

Saturday

Some of the tour party visited Stephen Basset at his studio for a session on rock art (including producing their own piece using authentic tools and paint). The rest of us met at **Pete Browns** to view his South Devon x Red Angus breeding operation. Morning Tea was held on the lovely lawns before we bussed to **Richard and Mandy Armstrong's Tweedale** to view their Dohne sheep operation and the Fenfield Red Cattle. This was followed by lunch. The weather was lovely and lunch was held on the lawn.

Next stop was **Winston South Devons** (John and Julie's home). After a brief overview by James Miller (who has just assumed the management of the operation), we wandered around the yards where the cattle had been identified to make it easier for us. I was really attracted to two young bulls by Thowra Downs Romany, and the group of two-year-old

heifers. Of particular interest to Graham and myself were the crossbred cows with their South Devon cross calves. As well as all of the cattle, there were Dormer sheep on display courtesy of Lindisfarne Stud. As there were several sheepmen in the touring party, I hope sufficient interest was shown to justify the effort Duncan Currie put into his display.

Dinner was held at Winston with steak and hot and cold dishes aplenty. I guessed there must have been close to 100 people there.

Once again, we returned to our hosts for the night. The generosity of the Cathcart community was magnificent.

Sunday

After farewelling our hosts at **Chris and Sally Purdon's VeeJay Red Angus and Wagyu Stud**, we inspected the cattle in the quickly gathering fog – it was amazing to watch it rolling down the hill to envelop the valley. Chris gave us an informative talk on the origins and future directions of his breeding programme, followed by a delicious morning tea.

We rolled out to the bus for the next part of the journey. Lunch was picnic style at Baddaford followed by a short walk through some truly tough country to visit the Nguni cattle which must have such tough constitutions to survive and thrive in the conditions – I don't think there anything there that wasn't prickly! The cattle were in good condition so I could see why we had been told that Nguni cattle can put on too much fat when they are feedlotted – they're used to living on less feed and their digestive systems are probably super efficient.

We arrived at **Pumba Game Reserve** and were dispersed into our three lodge groups prior to embarking on the first of our four game drives. The vehicles were open sided so we could get as good a view as possible of the wildlife. We were immediately rewarded with giraffe, elephant, impala etc. Dinner was held at one of the lodges so we could compare stories and maintain our group connection. Our rooms at Pumba were VERY luxurious replicas of African bomas.

Monday

Full day at Pumba. Started with a game drive in the morning drizzle. Ponchos are supplied (with good reason) and work well. What looked like being a bit of a flop due to the weather (it wasn't conducive to animals being out and about) changed as the weather lifted, and some excellent photos were obtained. Back at our lodge, we enjoyed a late breakfast while we looked out over the waterhole where the hippos live. At lunchtime, Graham and I had to wait until our Nyala (a largish member of the antelope family with horns!) visitor moved (he was browsing on the garden plants right outside our door) before we could return to the restaurant for more food. An afternoon game drive was followed by another group dinner, this time at our lodge so we only had to walk back to the room later (admittedly we had to have a ranger escort us because the lodges are not fenced and the animals can and do come right up to the buildings. We could hear the lion both nights, although he wasn't close enough to be a danger).

Tuesday

Final Game drive before leaving Pumba. Unfortunately, we never did see the leopard or the buffalo, but we did get up close and personal with elephant and we have fond memories to take with us forever. I would go back to Pumba in a heartbeat – I have told my family of we ever win lotto, we're taking everyone for a week!

After leaving Pumba we headed for **Port Elizabeth and the Conference**. Port Elizabeth is called the Windy City for a reason – it is windy! The conference opened with presentations from the President and then the various national delegates, which were both interesting and informative. So good to see photos of South Devon cattle in other countries.

Wednesday

Day two of the Conference.

The three South African speakers were excellent and certainly gave us some pertinent subjects to contemplate regarding the future of both our breed and the beef industry in general. **Peter Prinsloo** spoke on the **South African Red Meat Industry** – I have 3 pages of notes. An interesting point was that 40% of the South African beef herd lies in the hand of communal farmers and due to traditional grazing and animal husbandry have very poor production. There are 14.2 million cattle in the SA beef herd and 24.5 million sheep. 2.9 million cattle are slaughtered annually, mostly at meatworks. There are still problems with Foot and Mouth in Northern Natal and Limpopo and bio security problems with the (lack of) border with Namibia. SA has a very high uptake of herd recording.

As in many countries, the population is becoming more urbanized and the rural population is aging. Peter's strong feeling was that branded beef is the way of the future – people who have no connection with the production of their food want to have a story that accompanies their food.

Speaker two was **Charl Hunlun** from **The International Centre for Animal Breeding and Recording**. He gave us an **overview of South African South Devon breeding**. Again, I have about 3 pages of notes.

As with most other breeds, the SD are currently in restructure mode due to the three-year drought. Due to climatic conditions, in South Africa the average age at first calving is 34 months – it is not feasible to calve them earlier. The average age at weaning is 7 months. Only about 4.5% of bulls and 45% of females would be expected to be used as registered breeders, indicating the SA breeder's commitment to a strict selection criteria and a strong desire to lift the quality of their stud herd.

Speaker Three was **Japie van der Westhuizen**, whose subject was '**Joint Global Opportunities for South Devon Breeding – A Workable Perspective**'

I have 5 pages of notes from this speaker and it is safe to say he was full of interesting facts, observations and ideas. I believe some of his ideas on global co-operation will be actively pursued in the not too distant future.

He reiterated a couple of points which I particularly appreciated; particularly that selection criteria MUST include visual assessment; that you must have a clear breeding objective; and that your aim must be to produce the most kg of meat/ ha that your type of country can produce.

Selection for genetic merit and the potential use of genomics were also very interesting subjects.

After lunch, it was back to the bus through some very green dairy country, then miles of pine plantations and some spectacular gorges for the trip to **Plettenberg Bay** where we overnighted.

Thursday

A day of travelling broken by visits to Monkeyland and the adjoining Bird Sanctuary. I think it was agreed that while we enjoyed Monkeyland, the highlight was definitely the variety and sheer magnificence of the birds.

We arrived at **Knysna Quays** in time to check in to our rooms and then stroll to the shopping precinct for lunch. This is a pretty but very touristy place. Dinner was on board the paddle boat during a cruise on the lagoon – quite spectacular when the lights became more visible as darkness fell. Fortunately, we had to walk back to the motel, so we used up some of the calories we had consumed.

Friday

Off to the mountains again as we travelled from Knysna Quays to **Oudtshoorn**. The scenery quickly became quite spectacular with mountains on one side and ocean on the other. Once through the main mountains, we were in the Klein (Little) Karoo, a much drier area. A visit to a working Ostrich farm with details supplied by a very well informed guide was highlighted when Thelma and Jo bravely volunteered to ride an ostrich. There were many Ostrich farms in this area. I hadn't known that there were three different types of Ostrich, one of which is quite aggressive so is never used in commercial farming.

A visit to Cango Wildlife Ranch followed. Probably not as enjoyable as would be expected as we had only been at Pumba viewing wildlife in its natural environment just days before. However, the ensuing trip through the Cango Caves was certainly a highlight. They are quite magnificent, and so well presented to the public. The guide was extremely well informed and in true African tradition, had a lovely singing voice. Our resident singer (James Moon) sang Happy Birthday to Ann Thompson – brilliant acoustics. There used to be concerts held in the main cavern, but damage caused by patrons meant they had to cease.

The hotel for the night was old but good, and we enjoyed sharing our evening meal with half of the NZ contingent (Brian and Ann and Joan and Arnold).

Saturday

After a quick browse in the shops near the hotel (some very lovely items – so tempting), it was off on the bus for yet more rugged scenery (I had no idea that South Africa had so much

mountainous country) on our way to a Dohne sheep operation which included a state of the art automated/computerised feedlot along with the breeding and backgrounding. The sheep are run on the cereal stubble as part of the cropping cycle. The hospital shed was impressive but due to the very high labour requirements, would not be practical under Australian conditions. Electronic tags and scales use a weight based drafting system (similar to some Australian cattle feedlots we know of). Agricultural consultant Andre had joined the bus at lunchtime, so he gave us an overview of agricultural production in the area in general, as well as more precise details of the Dohne operation. He was peppered with questions regarding soil type, cropping, land values etc. It was good to be able to tap into his detailed knowledge. On arrival at **Arniston**, Graham and I were delighted to see we had scored an ocean front room – never slept overlooking the Indian Ocean before.

Dinner was at 'Willeens' (a traditional cottage and our party had it bursting at its seams) in the old fishing village and in true African tradition was more food than we could eat. The paella and fish were especially delicious. Andre and his wife joined us for dinner and entertained us with some excellent music in the Boer tradition – he's certainly multi skilled.

Sunday

I was out of bed at daylight to get some photos of sunrise over the ocean. After a breakfast nobody really needed, we headed off through flat country that built into rolling hills. First stop was Oak Valley Estate which is a very large family run operation, consisting of apple orchard, winery, flower farm (on a very large scale) and beef operation as well as a very good and well patronised restaurant where we had lunch. Apparently, their wines are excellent (reports from other tour participants). Again, we had the benefit of Andre's knowledge of production etc. for the morning.

Back on the bus and back into the mountains – just when you think South Africa can't get any more rugged; it does! We were in orchard country, predominantly apple, and vineyards. Through the Franschoek Pass and down into the town which is quite beautifully nestled at the foot of the mountains.

Monday

Morning at leisure in **Franschoek**, so more souvenir shopping. I wanted a hand painted fibreglass elephant but as soon as Graham saw the price, I was banned. It was gorgeous, but it did stand more than knee high and would have probably cost a small fortune to ship home (and it was quite expensive to start off with).

First stop of the day was Rickety Bridge winery where we were told the history of winemaking in the valley and the story behind each of the five wines that were offered for tasting – wasted on Graham and I as we don't like wine - but it was interesting that it was a woman who had started the winery about 100 years ago.

Lunch followed at another winery with an excellent restaurant and superb views over the valley. Graham still reckons this was the best steak he ate on tour. This was one of the

places that Henni's skill as a bus driver was tested – there was just enough room to turn the bus with absolutely nothing to spare and no room for error – he made it!

We climbed out of the valley and drove onto the plains around **Cape Town**. There is a viewing spot for Table Mountain where we stopped for the obligatory group photo with Table Mountain in the background. We booked into our hotel just in time to jump in the bus and go The Africa Café for a 5-course traditional meal. Fortunately, it was serve yourself, so I had little tastes. I particularly liked the Tapioca cheese bread and the African spiced drumsticks. I didn't really like the sweet potato balls which were rolled in sesame seeds, which rather surprised me as I do like sweet potato. A wonderful, melodic demonstration of African singing, and face painting for the braver members of our party completed the evening. There were traditional African liquors available for tasting – I tried the Van der Hum which is tangerine based and it was very nice – would be brilliant in a citrus cheesecake. I have found a recipe for the bread and am going to try making that as a food reminder of our travels.

Tuesday

After an early breakfast, we bussed to the base of **Table Mountain** to get on the cable car. These cars fit 62 people and climbs almost straight up, slowly rotating as it goes so that everyone on board gets the full effect of the superb outlook. There are only two cars; one up one down at the same time as counter balances. Spectacular views from the top and plenty of photo opportunities.

Next stop was **Hout Bay** for a 40-minute boat ride to check out the seals – they stink. I have no seawater in my veins at all but I did enjoy the boat ride although it was a trifle rough in one spot (I just made sure the camera strap was around my neck). The colour of the water was almost bottle green in places, quite fascinating.

Over what is arguably one of the most spectacular stretches of road in the world; along the side of the mountain and under the rock ledge, to the **Cape of Good Hope** for a late lunch. The fog kept rolling in in waves, so one minute there were wonderful views of the Ocean and the next there was a blanket of fog. We made a brief stop on the way back to Cape Town to view the African penguins which are more white than black.

Wednesday

Day of leisure in **Cape Town**. Most of the men and a couple of the women went back to Franschhoek to visit the motor museum which apparently was well worth the visit; beautifully presented and a wide variety of vehicles. I know Graham thoroughly enjoyed this trip.

Some of the party took the ferry to **Robben Island** to see where Nelson Mandela had been imprisoned for so long. A very sobering but interesting experience I believe. I went to the renowned V and A waterfront to finish my souvenir shopping in company with Narelle. Fortunately, I found exactly what I was looking for (a wooden mask for our Grandson's 16th

birthday present) and returned to the hotel well satisfied with our expedition. Narelle also found some choice items.

Wednesday night was the formal dinner; nice to see everyone in smart clothes after three weeks of living in jeans. After the presentation of thank you gifts to various people (principally John and Julie and Henni), and the official handover of the Presidency to Mervyn Rowe, the auction of donated items was carried out with admirable style by Richard Camp.

It was announced that we would convene again in **2020 in New Zealand** – yet to be confirmed whether Spring or Autumn.

Thursday

For us a leisurely breakfast as we still had another day before we left. Many goodbyes as the English contingent departed along with most of the New Zealanders and some of the Aussies.

We (Greg and Narelle, Rick, and Graham and I) walked back to the V and A, largely to show Graham where I had shopped. A tour through the Aquarium was ok but a bit flat (I think we were starting to suffer from information overload). The penguins were interesting. Lunch at a seafront restaurant was excellent, although we tried to only have a light lunch as we were booked to go to Ash steak restaurant that night. South African meals are soo generous. I was slightly disappointed by our visit to Ash restaurant. My steak was good but not great – maybe my expectations were too high, but I felt I had eaten two or three steaks of equal or better quality at other venues (including at Tweeling). Graham had slow cooked Beef ribs and he thoroughly enjoyed them. The veggies were excellent. Judging by the crush there, my opinion is certainly not in the majority. As we were arriving back to our hotel, the Cape Town fog rolled in and we went to bed for our last night in Cape Town to the rather mournful honk of the fog horns.

Friday

Only a handful of us left this morning. We farewelled John and Julie and Chris and Leonie as they had an early flight, then we sat down to our last South African breakfast. All of us (the six Aussies who were leaving together) were packed and ready to go by 10.30 – just as well as it turned out. Our driver had to take us by a different route to the airport due to enormous traffic problems (bad accident I think). We saw the traffic backed up for miles as we travelled. After a pretty easy time of checking in with South African Airways, the last 6 Aussies (Greg and Narelle, Daphne, Rick, Graham and I) boarded our flight to Johannesburg. Our South African adventure was really ending. We had a couple of hours to wait in Johannesburg before our flight; Daphne much longer as she was flying to Perth, not Sydney as we were. Some last-minute memento shopping was done at Joburg airport and then we boarded our Qantas flight.

Saturday

After a long but uneventful flight – I have finally learned to sleep on a plane – we arrived in Sydney mid-afternoon. Through customs (I held my breath as I presented the wooden mask

and carved horns, but they were both passed with no problems) and off to the transit lounge for the Queenslanders. We said goodbye to Rick as he was overnighing in Sydney prior to his flight to Tamworth on Sunday. After a short wait, it was just another hour on the plane to Brisbane and a rather long wait for our bags on the carousel (I think we got off the plane faster than the luggage did). Goodbyes were said and Greg and Narelle headed off to their daughters for the night and we were picked up by Graham's sister and brother in law.

Back to reality! Bugger!!

Overview

South Africa is a land of huge contrasts – huge wealth and huge poverty. The people we met were wonderful and the South African hospitality hard to beat. The countryside was very different to what I had expected; I was expecting much more open country and less mountains. Maybe if we had gone further west, it may have been like that. I also had no idea that there was so much of South Africa that experienced snow. In fact, I quickly realised that I really didn't know much about South Africa at all. It is an exciting country that seems to have such a lot of potential but careful political decisions need to be made for that potential to be realized. I think you would have to grow up with their political system to understand it. I truly hope things work out well; it is such a vibrant and unique country.

We thoroughly enjoyed our trip. We feel we have made some long-term friends among the South African South Devon breeders, and we really appreciated the trouble that they had gone to so they could show us their cattle. And they showed us their cattle as they really are; no primping, straight out of the paddock.

Tours like this are so valuable in fostering strong ties between breeders from all over the world. I feel we are about to enter a time of much closer co-operation between our national societies, due in no small part to the ties forged by these tours and conferences. Already there are plans for rekindling the friendships in NZ – and some of our new South African South Devon family members are planning to be there.

I would thoroughly recommend a trip to South Africa to anyone who may have the opportunity. Yes, there are places you shouldn't go and places where you don't go after dark on your own – we've got them too! Go with an open mind and heart, take your common sense with you and you will have an amazing time.

Would I go back – offer me a ticket and see how fast it gets accepted!!