

# The Kloof News

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Spring Equinox has just passed (23<sup>rd</sup> September) our big old oak tree has begun to show its green leaves, the mountain tortoises are out en masse and mating like there's no tomorrow (or no 2013?) And today we hit the upper thirties for the first time this season. So, do I need any more excuses for writing another newsletter?



One of our 42 Mountain tortoises on a beautiful spring day

## ***{ Just Another Day in the Kloof }***

It all started with some "stupid" moves. Late in 2010 I needed to check our kloofing campsite for the coming season. So one fine October weekend I decided to test my strength and after breakfast I headed out into the Nuy River Gorge without any supplies, just a pair of pruning shears and a bow saw. Last time I did this circular trip it took 8 hours. Add some clearing work along the trail and the campsite; it should not take me more the 10 I gathered. Off I went, four dogs in front, all in their element. When we came past Frieda's cul de sac of last time, she showed some uncertainty, but eventually kept going. At the campsite we encountered the usual annual overgrowth, cleared it all, including

piling up some firewood for the next kloofing trip. Tired but happy with today's work, I called it a day and prepared for the 80m swim through the icy river pool. As I jumped into the cold water Matata followed like an otter in disguise, Frieda right behind her. Then I realised that the boys stayed behind, barking loudly not to be forgotten. After much calling they finally followed suit but obviously under much duress. This was NOT their cup of tea! The old boy Kanda came all the way, but young Kahlo took the first chance to climb out of the river and high up the rocks. There he stood like a K9 version of Lorelei, except that his howling didn't represent anything like her singing, but it got me back into the water, this time with a long piece of driftwood for a raft for this "barking chicken". Eventually all 5 of us were upriver and time as well as my energy was disappearing fast. I engaged plan "B" and headed up the escape route to cut the journey home shorter. The beginning was quite pleasant but halfway up it got steeper and I had to lift Matata up the high boulders. Little later as we took a breather and enjoyed the view, I was baffled to see, way down between the boulders on the other side of the gorge, were two human beings!



Border Collie Kanda on the Gecko Trail

Now this is not Table Mountain where sighting another hiking party is nothing special. Here it simply never happens – until today! Who were these people? And they even had dogs with them... that's when it dawned, the guests at Faraway Cottage had 3 dogs, must be them! So I shouted their names and assuming they had spotted me in my bright orange t-shirt, I climbed higher "showing" them the escape route. When I reached the edge of the gorge, I scanned the river below but the hikers had vanished. I headed home hungry after a day's adventure, but making a mental note of the time. It was 16:00, so I could check on them when they should be back at the cottage.

### { *The Rescue Mission* }

At 17:30 I arrived back home and Mareletta stormed out telling me that she just received a phone call from one of our guests: "They were sitting in distress, on a ledge high up in the Nuy River Gorge..." THAT was the least I expected! Luckily they found the only spot with cellphone reception in the whole of the gorge. What now? I immediately phoned back and was able to establish their position with the help of where I saw them last and the position of the sun and river... No time to lose, they had NO food, no water (dropped their glass bottle), no warm clothes, whatsoever. Classic, I thought and packed a couple of energy bars, water, warm clothes, a head torch and my cellphone (never before used at Simonskloof – it felt very strange...) We had agreed that they would try to climb higher along that ledge if possible and I'd meet them climbing down from the top of point 1113. We should just about meet at last light or about 30min after. One of my guests in the Farmhouse joined the search party – Two is better than one.



A guest abseiling into the Nuy River Gorge

My stomach was growling, after all I still did not have a decent bite all day, but that had to wait a little longer, I feed on adrenaline, if such a thing is possible. By the time we reached p.1113 it was dark but the moonshine helped to make out the rocky ridge and we scrambled to a better vantage point. Nothing, no sight of the hikers! They did not have a torch, mind you, and their cellphone could have run out of power by now. Or was it switched off as we had said for plan "B", in which case they could not make it up the ridge and turned around back down to the river for the night – at least it's less exposed down there. So we proceeded to the cliff edge from where I could see the river. I shone my light down into the abyss, shouted and waited for a response –

nothing! I tried a couple more times, yet to no avail. They were NOT down THERE and that was all we could do for today. Climbing down the initial ridge in the dark would be suicide. They simply had to sit the night out in the mountains. Luckily they had 3 dogs as "bed warmers" because last night it dropped down to 8°... Shortly after ten we were back at home, slapped some steaks on the grid, I was hungry like a wolf!



Bordercollie Frida at the basalt (rock) pool

The next morning I was up before 6, joined again by the guest from the farmhouse, we headed down the valley to yesterday's escape route. From here we should see the hikers and direct them out of the gorge. By 7 we stood high above the rock dam surveying the river up and down. But, NOTHING! After an hour checking different vantage points we returned to the farmhouse. Now there were only two options: Either they made their way back as they came in, or they were in serious trouble. Hence, now was the time to call for professional support - Mountain Rescue from Cape Town. A helicopter was put on standby and we made 12 o'clock the cut-off time (enough to make it back to the house including an hour or two to spare) to allow for enough daylight for a search and rescue. Time was ticking away slowly and eventually I could not sit around any longer, doing nothing. I had one hour left until cut-off. So I grabbed my "rescue" pack and told Mareletta that if I'm not back by 12 o'clock, I would have spotted the hikers and gone down into the gorge to assist them, hence she can call off the chopper. If I didn't spot them I could make it back in time and it's all in the hands of the rescue guys.

At 11:30 I was just about to turn around, when at last, I heard them respond to my calls and shortly after they came into sight. They were fine, but pretty weak and hungry, gobbling down the energy bars and apples I brought along. After a short rest we headed back to the house together. I don't quite know if the chopper crew was delighted to hear that I found the missing ones or if they were looking forward to checking out a new gorge from above... I for sure was glad, not to have to read about this ordeal in one of the big papers!

### { *The Moral of the Story* }

So what is the moral of this story? *NEVER* go into the Wild or Mountains without appropriate gear! Which should include:

- Food (plus an energy bar for emergency)
- Water in an unbreakable bottle
- Warm clothing (just today we had 8°-36°)

- Space blanket – they only cost R15-40 depending where you shop
- Matches, or a lighter (does not get wet)
- Torch - the little “Petzl E+Lite” is brilliant!
- Map of the area (and learn to read maps!!!)
- Compass is optional - you can do that with your wristwatch or the stars
- Cellphone – even in remote places – you’ll never know where the signal bounces off

All the above hardly makes a dent in your daypack, but can stand between life and death or a costly rescue mission. Last but not least: Tell someone WHERE you are going and STICK to your plan, even if the views you’ll encounter will make you want to deviate from your route.

### **{ Solar Power House }**

In December 2010 I had just returned from a quick trip to Haarlem in the Langkloof, where friends of mine have an off-grid mountain farm, tucked away at the end of the road, similar to ours. Anton and Lorraine power their house with an array of solar panels and a wind generator for rainy days – hence we got talking. A couple of months later I got my first shipment of second hand panels from Anton’s contact. But how ironic is that? These panels come from a settlement in the bush somewhere up in Limpopo, which “finally” received an Eskom connection; hence they did not need the solar panels any longer. Well thanks guys for going “onto the grid” so we can keep off-grid ☺ ...



Our freshly & healthily painted house

With a simple timber structure I fixed the 4 panels - 200w in total – on our back roof, connected them with 10m of wire and via a regulator to 3x105amp batteries... this just for starters. In the meantime we’ve added a 500w inverter and have another 2 panels waiting. On that note let’s jump back to October 2005, when I installed our first set-up for the office (a 80w panel and 2x105amp batteries). In May 2011 after 5 ½ years we had to replace the 2 batteries – it’s a bit short-lived, they should last 7 years I was told, but we did not monitor the consumption very well and I guess strained the hardware more than we should have. However, the saving of petrol (we would have kept using our generator for the same work) to date is a whopping R35’000.00. NOW that shines a different light on the matter altogether. Next is to connect the system: A fridge, saving another 15kg of LPG a month and that’s not for just a couple of eco friendly cold beers! So if you

want to go the route of the sun, start today and start with hot water, the return is instant!

### **{ Makadas Adventure Race }**

On the weekend of the 10<sup>th</sup> September 2010 Mitzi and her husband of Makadas Adventure staged an Adventure Race in the Koo Valley. Part of the mountain bike route was past Simonskloof down to Keerom dam where they entered the Nuy River gorge and “running” our 3 day kloofing trip in reverse. The fastest team clocked 2.5hours only - mad!!! Took me 8 hours once, dogs and all. It was fun (and scary) to check out those “youngsters” in branded Lycra all zooming through here. Check: [www.youtube.com/embed/yGFCoOcjUk](http://www.youtube.com/embed/yGFCoOcjUk). They wanted to come back last September, but changed the route slightly, going through neighbouring farms. But watch this space for an even tougher race - said to go over a length of 250km - around March 2012, through the Nuy River Gorges again!

### **{ Organic Inspirations }**

Sometime at the beginning of February 2011 we allowed ourselves a break and together with our three WWOOFers we headed East to Buffelshoek, an organic farm [www.blueskyorganics.co.za](http://www.blueskyorganics.co.za) near Van Wyksdorp, for much needed inspiration. We arrived on a Sunday afternoon and stayed in the cosy cottage overlooking a traditional labyrinth and the organic olive grove. The next day, owner Liz Eglinton gave us an extensive tour of her farm, explaining her growing method of companion planting for bug control and showed us her workshop, where she processes all her produce into most delicious tapenade, stuffed olives, olive chutney - jam and -marmalade, with or without chillies, or “just plain” Organic Olive oils just to mention a few... After a wholesome lunch with all the ingredients picked on the farm we headed back home full of ideas and feeling slightly guilty about our slow progress at Simonskloof.

### **{ Natural Paint & Yellow House }**

Well a week or two later, with the help of our Swiss (Lucia & Lawrence the ex-cop) and Spanish (Daniel the drummer) WWOOFers, the new garden, close to our house had its porcupine proof fence and a couple of months later even a full-on sprinkler system.



The new porcupine proof vegetable garden

In May we again had a good team of WWOOFers from Holland & Germany (Ron and Sabrina) and even

Mauritius (Oliver) and hence our house took another leap forward. The outside walls got scraped and cleaned and finally painted with EnviroTouch's ProNature range, an eco-friendly and non-toxic, totally natural paint (also used at Liz's workshop...). Check out more on: [www.pronature.co.za](http://www.pronature.co.za). So now we no longer live in the building site, but in the "little yellow house" at the end of the road ☺ and it feels real good!!!

By the middle of June 2011 while Carrie a local WWOOFer TLC'd our new garden, Oliver helped me build the veranda, using the telephone poles of the old kraal. To excavate landfill from the back of the house I called in our friend "Handy-Charles" from Langdam and his new digger-loader. A déjà vu for us, since it was the same yellow monster that was stuck for months and blocked our access road two years ago... No mishaps this time!

### { Media Coverage }

On the publication front we were blessed with yet another mentioning in GO! / Weg Magazine. Not just a couple of lines no, a full-on 7 page story by assistant editor Jon Minster himself! He visited us for a 2-day kloofing trip of the Nuy River Gorge in early December 2010. Check out their back issue of March 2011, or visit: [www.gomag.co.za/photogalleries/gallery\\_new/563](http://www.gomag.co.za/photogalleries/gallery_new/563)



Jon from GO! magazine kloofing the Nuy River Gorge

Around the same subject of kloofing we also received a fantastic online write-up by Stormy Sweitzer, a member of a group of travellers from the Utah in the USA:

"...Having spent a great deal of time in the canyons of Utah's San Rafael Swell and Escalante, I was amazed by their similarities with the Nuy River Gorge, but also their incredible differences. I felt at home in the gorge and appreciated why Jurgen so loved this terrain that he and his brother had hiked and climbed for years..."

[www.strayoutdoors.com/kloofing-nuy-river-gorge-in-south-africa](http://www.strayoutdoors.com/kloofing-nuy-river-gorge-in-south-africa) for the full story.

### { Tylecodon paniculata GIGANTUS }

When Fritz, a nature conservation student from Cape Town, WWOOFed with us in July 2011, he came across this giant Botterboom of 2.2m while surveying the farm for "unusual" flowers. Now what makes it special is that those Butter trees (Tylecodon paniculata of the Crassulacae family) reach an average of only 1.5m and that this stem succulent is standing right on top of, what I was told years ago by a former resident of Simonskloof, an old bushman's grave...



Jurgen next to the giant Botterboom

### { Zip-Sliding the Koo }

While the country celebrated woman's day on the first weekend of last August, we tried out the latest adventure activity in the Koo Valley. Karoo Adventures [www.karooadventures.co.za/?page\\_id=181](http://www.karooadventures.co.za/?page_id=181) just 15km up the road from us, launched its latest baby: A six stages Zip-Slide high above the Koeniekraalkloof. It was the perfect blue sky winters day and we had the honour to be the first (paying) "Zipper" sliding across this pristine kloof. Danie and Nickel personally watched over us and made sure we were safely hooked up to the steel cable while zooming from platform to platform. So next time you have a "break" at Simonskloof and are still in need of more adrenaline pumping through your veins after our abseil- and kloofing- trips that is ☺ head up Rooihooft pass and turn right to Eendracht farm.

### { Budget Getaway Book – Giveaway }

Love it or hate it... in the end there's no business without publicity, be it word of mouth (the most desirable of course) or articles in a newspaper, magazine or website. Thus we call upon you, our faithful visitors to recall your stay(s) at Simonskloof, Hikes of the Gecko Trail, kloofing or abseiling the Nuy River Gorge and dot down a couple of lines of your POSITIVE experience then submit them on [http://www.budget-getaways.co.za/pages/getaway\\_rate.aspx?id=120](http://www.budget-getaways.co.za/pages/getaway_rate.aspx?id=120) Your NEGATIVE ones (hey, there are two sides to a coin!) please send to [info@simonskloof.com](mailto:info@simonskloof.com) so we can add them to our "To Do List" and make sure it will not happen again. We'll select a winner each (+ & -) the prize is a copy of "Guide to Best Budget Getaways".



Still in time for the December holidays, just in case you can't get a spot at Simonskloof of course.

Kitta's five kittens born 10.10.2011

Happy days, from all of us plus the 5 new little ones!