

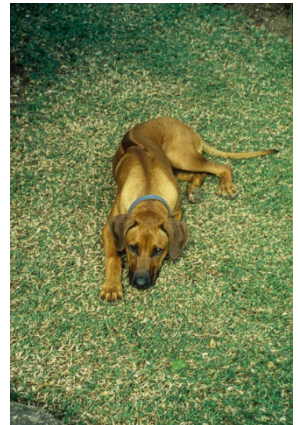
## Boondock's – A Private South African Game Reserve

In March of 2001, I had a business trip to Rome and Nairobi to teach GIS training classes for the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP). The journey began with a flight from Los Angeles to Atlanta aboard Delta Airlines, and then on to Amsterdam with KLM Airlines. From Amsterdam I continued to Rome to attend a UN meeting and then on to Nairobi aboard KLM. The flights were very comfortable in business class; the result of a Delta Airlines upgrade due to my Million Miler status. Over the next two weeks in Nairobi, I taught a GIS training class at the UNEP headquarters, had a great day touring Nairobi National Park, and an amazing wildlife adventure in Amboseli National Park! (But that's another travel blog.)

After saying farewell to Willy and Thomas, my hosts in Nairobi as we shared a delicious dinner at an Indian restaurant in the local "Village Market", I packed my bags in preparation for my departure to Johannesburg, South Africa the next day. Early the following morning, Thomas drove me to the airport by a route through Nairobi National Park - what a wonderful way to get to the airport! As we drove across the East African plains, I felt sad to leave Kenya. At the airport I bade a fond farewell to Thomas who had been my host and guide for the past two weeks. Then I checked in for my flight to Johannesburg and headed for the South African Airways First Class Lounge where I spent the time catching up on my travel notes as I enjoyed a cold glass of South African Castle beer.



The 4-hour flight to Johannesburg was very nice, especially as an excellent lunch of poached salmon in rosemary cream sauce with fresh steamed vegetables was served, accompanied by a glass of superb "Ft Simons 1999 Chardonnay Wine" from the Cape region! Upon arrival in Johannesburg, my dear friend Stuart, who was the driver on the overland expedition across Africa in 1974, met me and we headed to his Toyota 4x4 truck to drive east on the "N4 Freeway" for 3 and half hours to the small town of Kaapmuiden near the border between Kruger National Park and the country of Swaziland (Eswatini)! [see *maps on pages 6 - 8*] Along the way we encountered an area of dense fog and a very slow hatchback car loaded to the roof in front of us. And since Stuart liked to drive at 160 kph (85 mph), he was more than a bit frustrated until we cleared the fog and he could safely overtake the slow driver. After a couple of hours, we stopped in a small roadside village to get a cheeseburger and chips at a tiny café called "Milly's". It was a welcome stop late at night. Then just before midnight we finally arrived at "Boondocks" where we were greeted by Stuart's companion Ann and their young puppy, a beautiful "Rhodesian Ridgeback" named Scout! As Ann showed me to "Bungalow #1" I realized there was no electricity when she lighted the candles in the room! That night I enjoyed a very quiet and relaxing sleep by candlelight!



"Scout"



The next morning, I woke up to a spectacular view from my veranda under sunny skies – the valley below spread out before me, range upon range of mountains extending to Kruger National Park in the distance! My shower

was a gorgeous rock enclosure that was fed by solar heated water. In fact, the entire bathroom was constructed of native stone, including the washbasin that was literally "carved" from a solid piece of granite! After the lovely shower, I joined Stuart and Ann on the large patio at the lodge beneath the shade of Acacia trees and overlooking the valley below and mountains beyond. We enjoyed hot coffee, followed by a



delicious breakfast of homemade muesli topped with yogurt, fresh cherries, mango, papaya, and pineapple – incredible! At the same time, we had gorgeous views of the lovely garden. Stuart told me he had a staff of five local people that consisted of a gardener, cook, maid, ranger, and handyman for the cost of \$5,000 a year! The Boondocks estate and nature reserve consisted of a large, beautiful stone lodge, several stone “bungalows”, extensive gardens, and over 5,000 acres of natural grassland and forested mountains, some of which were over 4,000 feet high, as well as several perennial streams and springs. The nature reserve was home to many species of birds, mammals, and reptiles, including Impala, Kudu, Waterbuck, Wart Hogs, Eagles, Owls, Wildebeest, and the rare Red Dyker deer. And of course, we shouldn’t forget the Baboons and Vervent Monkeys! As we sat on the patio enjoying breakfast, Stuart pointed out that almost everything we could see belonged to him and Ann!

Later, after breakfast, Stuart and I walked down along the edge of the stream flowing in front of the lodge to see where Ann planned to construct a “labyrinth”. (Ann was a founding member of “Findhorn” in Scotland, a mecca for the emerging “New Age Society” in the 1970’s) When Stuart and I returned to the lodge, the three of us drove to the small town of Kaapmuiden (meaning Cape Muiden in Afrikaans) to get petrol for their portable electric generator. (Boondocks was entirely off the electric grid) It was also an opportunity to pick up some groceries, including bread and milk, as well as the mail at “Park’s Butcher Shop”! Kaapmuiden was a small, lazy town with a very strong Afrikaans heritage and culture. (note: as we left Boondock’s we spotted large herds of Impala, Warthogs, and two Grey Dyker deer, all of which were on Stuart’s land) Leaving Kaapmuiden, we drove to Barberton through a beautiful long valley of deep green sugarcane fields in a rich agricultural region. Barberton was an old mining town established in the late 1800’s, but it is now best known for having exported the very first



*View from the veranda*



*Barberton*

“Daisey”, native in South Africa, to Kew Gardens in London. While we were in Barberton, we had lunch at the “CoCoVan Café” that was owned by two English friends of Stuart and Ann. Following a delicious lunch, we spent the afternoon running “errands” around the small town – a lovely, quiet, friendly place. I couldn’t help but notice many lovely old 1800’s era Victorian houses at the foot of the steep mountains along the border with Swaziland.

From Barberton we drove to the small town of White River for dinner at the “Ten Green Bottles Restaurant” – a lovely old estate in the mountains. Next to the restaurant was a small collection of arts and crafts shops, as well as a repertory theatre. One shop that really caught my eye was called “Sleeper Woods” which had gorgeous furniture made from old teak railroad ties (“sleepers” in British English) that had been used on the former “Rhodesian Railway”. Unfortunately, despite the incredible beauty of the furniture, none of it would have fitted into my checked baggage, so I settled for one of their lovely brochures! For dinner we shared a fabulous meal by candlelight – tandoori prawns, pan-fried filet of butterfish, and Cajun calamari! I was very impressed with their extensive menu and the excellent service. And I was very happy to be able to treat Stuart and Ann to dinner that night. As the evening came to a close, we celebrated with a chilled glass





of champagne and then headed back to Boondocks for a “nightcap” on the patio under a wonderful moonlit sky! Stuart and I sat on the patio for quite some time, fondly recalling the days we had spent travelling overland across Africa several years ago! Then I retired to my bungalow for a very quiet and peaceful night’s rest.

Early the next morning, after another delicious breakfast on the patio with Stuart and Ann, they took me on a long drive around their property where we saw large numbers of wildlife, including the very rare, endangered Red Dyker deer! (Boondocks was designated a UN World Heritage Site a few years ago to preserve the species) Within just 30 minutes of driving around the nature preserve we had seen hundreds



*Stuart and Ann*



*View of Kruger National Park in the distance*

of Impalas, a small herd of Wildebeest, several Wart Hogs, two large Fish Eagles, and two Grey Dyker deer! Stuart drove us up to the top of a

saddle between two of the “Three Sisters Mountains at an elevation over 3,000 feet. The route took us over a very rough track, and in several places, we had to get out and look over the route to make sure we could safely proceed. A short distance later, Stuart pointed to an old, abandoned gold mine site where one might find some rare and unique wildflowers. From there, we had incredible views of the mountains surrounding us and Kruger National Park in the distance – a beautiful scene!

As we returned to the lodge, Stuart drove down a very steep, rough track following the main stream, “bushwacking” most of the way, but certainly nothing that Stuart couldn’t handle. As we reached the lodge it was time for brunch – hot coffee and a typical full English breakfast served on the patio. Afterwards, I took a long 4-hour hike along the old entrance road and saw many Impala and Wart Hogs, but they kept their distance. At one point, I came upon a group of Vervet Monkeys playing close to an old, abandoned water tank that had once been used for cattle ranching more than 40 years ago. The monkeys were really enjoying their play among the old cement structures! At last, I reached a “Kopje” (rock outcrop) that Stuart had



*Kopje and view of the Three Sisters*

pointed out to me the day before. By now it was becoming quite warm and humid, though the sky was still overcast. I took a short break and sat on the warm rock, looking at the “Three Sisters” in the distance. Meanwhile, small lizards sunned themselves nearby and didn’t pay much attention to me.

I headed back to the lodge as the late afternoon became quite humid, and bees buzzed in the thick brush around me. To be honest, it was a tough “slog” back uphill to the lodge. And after downing two bottles of cold water, I headed for the outdoor shower. As I stood on the old teak wooden floor overlooking the valley below and the

mountains beyond, there was nothing between me and the “world” below! It was the most exhilarating and free feeling! The solar heated water was the perfect temperature, having been warmed by the sun all day. After my luxurious shower, I sat on the veranda of my bungalow with a cold South African beer, writing my



travel notes as I gazed upon the mountains of Swaziland just beyond the boundary of Boondocks. The sun began its slow descent to the western horizon, and it cast a long, beautiful glow through the Acacia trees



*Outdoor shower*



*Relaxing on the patio with a cold beer*

around me and the garden in front. (a lovely, peaceful introduction to the evening!) Unfortunately, later in the night I awoke with a classic case of “traveler’s stomach”. So, I immediately took some “Immodium A/D” which helped settle things very quickly, allowing me to return to a deep sleep.

I got up a bit late the next morning and joined Stuart and Ann for another delicious breakfast of Muesli, yogurt, and honey as we sat on the patio. I spent most of the day relaxing around the lodge, taking photos and writing my travel notes. That evening we all went to Nelspruit, the largest town in the region to share dinner at “Casa del Sol”, a small Mediterranean restaurant run by a curious elderly Italian lady who had moved from Mozambique some 15 years ago. Apparently, she possessed an advanced college degree in Psychiatric Counseling! As we arrived at the restaurant, a very anxious parking lot attendant quickly “directed” Stuart into an empty parking spot, much as if he was guiding a “747”! It was fun to watch him, and Stuart made the best of the moment by tipping him handsomely! (all the parking lot attendant needed to make it a “perfect landing” were the orange light sticks to complete the scenario!)

Dinner started with fresh sauteed calamari that was very tender and superb, followed by a delicious fresh filet of King Klip sautéed simply in lemon and garlic butter. We shared a wonderful dinner that evening and talked about the love Stuart and Ann had for Africa. On the return home to Boondocks, I saw a large sign along the highway which read “Caution – Entering a Traffic Calming Zone”! Stuart informed me that it was an area patrolled by the police to enforce a lower speed limit in an attempt to reduce the high number of fatal accidents. As we approached the lodge at night, we were fortunate to see a number of large Owls in the trees along the road.

The next morning, after another very quiet peaceful night’s rest in my bungalow, I sadly packed my bags and phoned South African Airways to book a ticket from Nelspruit to Johannesburg. Then I joined Stuart and



Ann for breakfast on the patio before engaging “Scout” in a last game of fetch in the lovely garden overlooking the valley. Then, all too soon it was time to leave Boondocks for the drive to Nelspruit airport. Stuart took a very scenic route through the spectacular “Crocodile River Gorge” where huge, rounded brilliant red sandstones cliff hung precariously above us. From there we turned north up a steep road through mile after mile of extensive pine and blue gum forest plantations, which Stuart said were the world’s largest. Suddenly we encountered heavy wet clouds near the top of the mountain and ran into a steady drizzle.

That’s when I noticed a couple of roadside warning signs – “Beware of Wild Horses on the Roadway” – as well as many large deposits of manure! But we never spotted any wild horses – apparently, they didn’t care



to be out in the chilly wet weather. At the summit we came to a large grassy knoll and a curious old gold mining town where there were some beautiful old wooden buildings that had been “repurposed” as small cafes, bars, and a hotel along either side of the narrow, muddy main street. Stuart announced that we had arrived at the village of Kaapmuiden, situated on the edge of a steep escarpment that had amazing views of the valley below and mountains beyond – all the way to the coast of the Indian Ocean on the eastern horizon! Unfortunately, on this day we were in the middle of thick clouds and couldn’t see much beyond the edge of the village!

We had plenty of time to stop at the “Kaapmuiden Pannekaken Huis” for a delicious lunch of a savory pancake filled with smoked ham, fresh baby asparagus, and cheese sauce. The tiny café was built in the late 1800’s and decorated with a flurry of bright yellow sunflowers! (such a beautiful place on a chilly wet day outside) After lunch, the heavy wet mist lifted a bit and we chose to walk down the muddy main street to one of the oldest buildings, once the original general store and assay office and now shared between a curious old antique shop and a “raunchy” biker bar!

(several motorcycles were parked outside the bar) Stuart, Ann and I “browsed” through the antique shop where I found a beautiful “First Day” stamp of old narrow gauge railroad locomotives from Southwest Africa, now Namibia. Meanwhile Stuart discovered an old brochure titled “In Defence of Apartheid”, and Ann found a small treasure of old children’s books. To be sure, the shop was small but fascinating, however, we eventually had to pull ourselves away and head to Nelspruit airport.



*Village of Kaapmuiden*

At the airport, I bid a very fond farewell to Stuart and Ann, with the promise to stay in touch and perhaps return in the future, before boarding the small commuter flight to Johannesburg. It was a pleasant one-hour flight, and I was surprised to learn it was one of two daily flights to Johannesburg, and they were scheduled only one hour apart! So, we arrived in Johannesburg just as the second daily flight was departing Nelspruit. The arrival in Johannesburg was in the middle of a heavy thunderstorm and there was a short delay getting to the terminal building. But upon arrival, I walked over to the new Intercontinental Hotel conveniently located in the airport. After checking into my room, I headed to the hotel’s “Flying Fox Bar” for a cold pint of Castle beer and watched a rugby match on the bar TV. Later in the evening, I had a delicious dinner of grilled New Zealand lamb chops in the “Detroit Spur Restaurant” next door.

The next morning, I boarded the South African Airways flight to Nairobi, and I was surprised when we were served Ostrich for lunch - very tender and delicious! The four-hour flight was very comfortable seated in business class, and upon arriving in Nairobi I had a few hours to wait before the next flight on KLM to Amsterdam. Fortunately, I was able to spend the time in the South African Airways First Class Lounge. After a while I decided to check out the duty-free shops and saw one called “African Electronics and Music”. Looking around the shop, I noticed a lot of electronic equipment on the shelves, but one and only one music CD titled “The Best of the African Sound”, so I bought it!

Throughout the time I spent in the First-Class Lounge, there was a weird combination of recorded traditional African music periodically interrupted by airport announcements about, (1) control your bags, (2) no smoking except in designated areas, and (3) to our esteemed customers, the airport is undergoing renovation. But the weirdest thing I noticed was a series of programs on TV featuring Christian evangelists and preachers being broadcast from a Christian evangelist TV station in southern California!! (WEIRD – halfway across the globe!) Once boarding was called for the KLM flight to Amsterdam, departure was delayed by some powerful thunderstorms passing over the airport. So, our plane sat on the tarmac for almost an hour while being pelted by torrential rain. But once we were airborne, drinks and dinner were

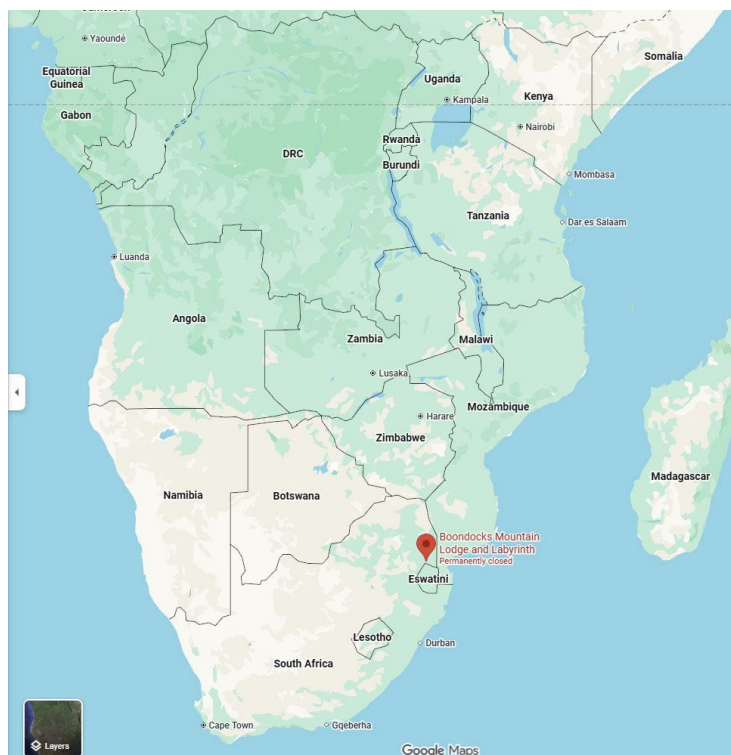


served promptly, which helped to make the long 9-hour overnight flight more relaxing. As we approached Europe early the next morning, we had spectacular views of the snow-capped Alps at dawn. Due to the delay leaving Nairobi, I had to run to catch my connecting flight to Rome!

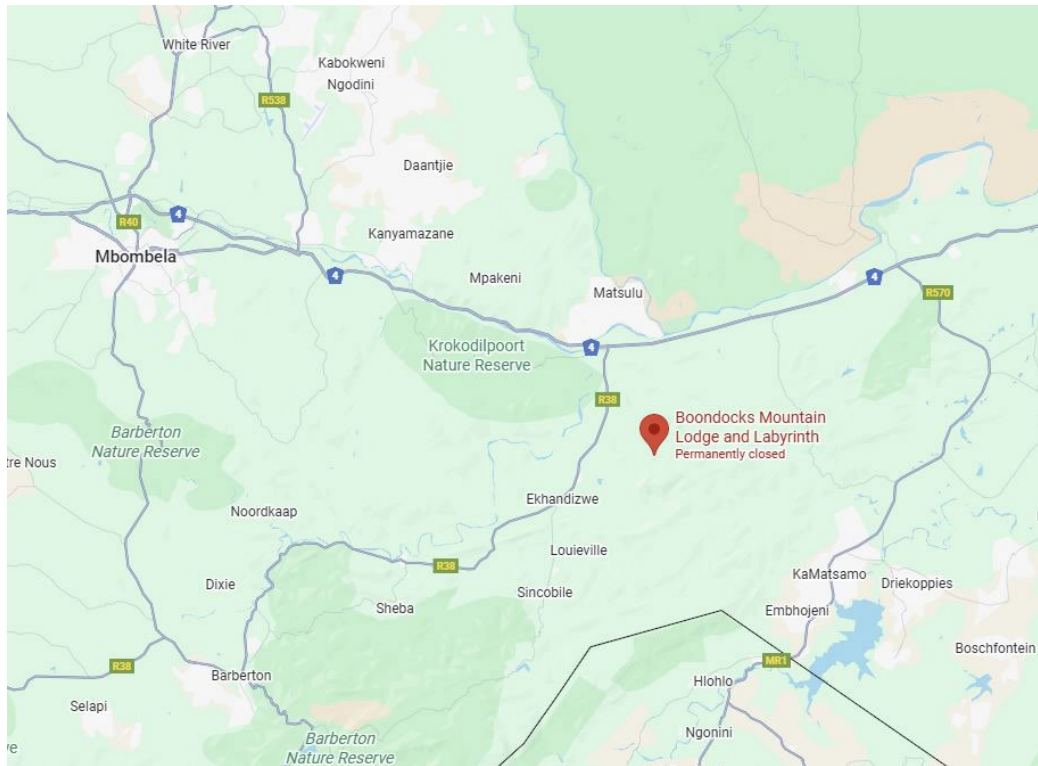
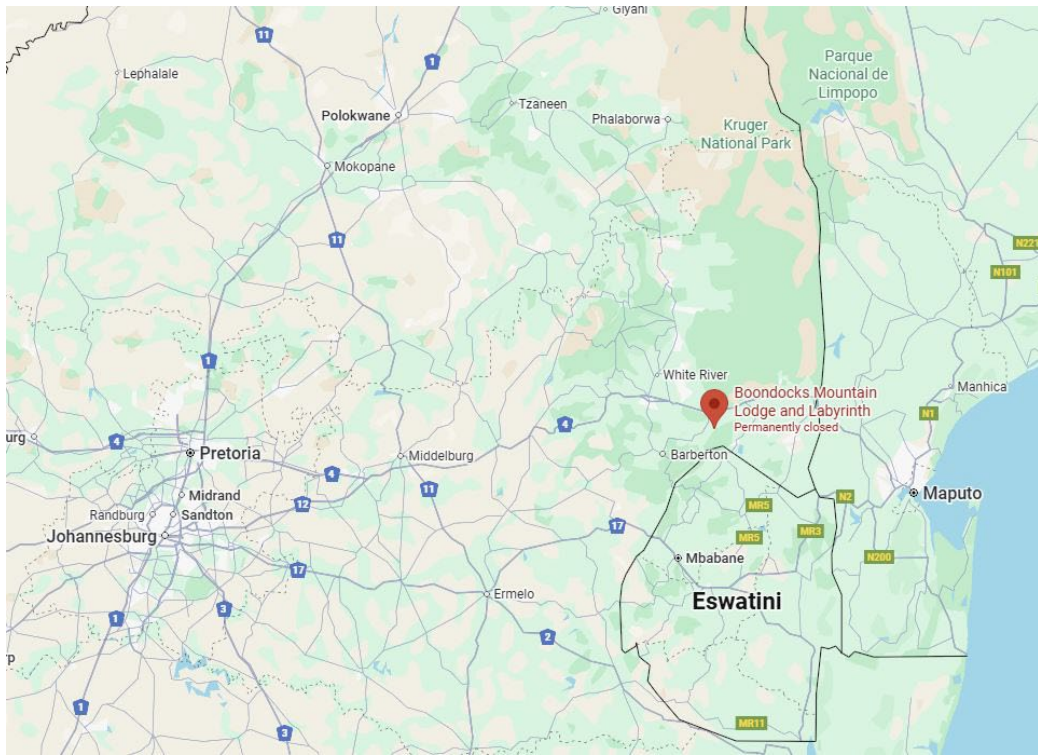
Upon arriving in Rome, I had enough time to take a shower in the new Alitalia First-Class Lounge which I was looking forward to. It was a beautiful facility, but the water heaters weren't working at capacity, so the shower was lukewarm at best, though still very welcome after two days of travel, and especially so before boarding the 11-hour flight to Atlanta! It was a very nice flight from Rome to Atlanta with the excellent service in Delta Airlines' new business class cabin. For lunch I chose the Seafood Brochette (broiled crayfish, scallops, and king prawns) served with peppers, lemon butter sauce, saffron rice, and fresh steamed vegetables, accompanied by a glass of Italian Pinot Grigio. It was fantastic to be sure. However, my bags didn't make it on the flight to Atlanta, so they arrived in Redlands the next morning.

As I write these notes and look at the photos I took, I am constantly reminded of many previous travel experiences that I will carry with me as well as memories of this trip. Though it was one of several dozen trips that I made while I worked for ESRI, this trip will remain one of my most favorite and memorable for these reasons.

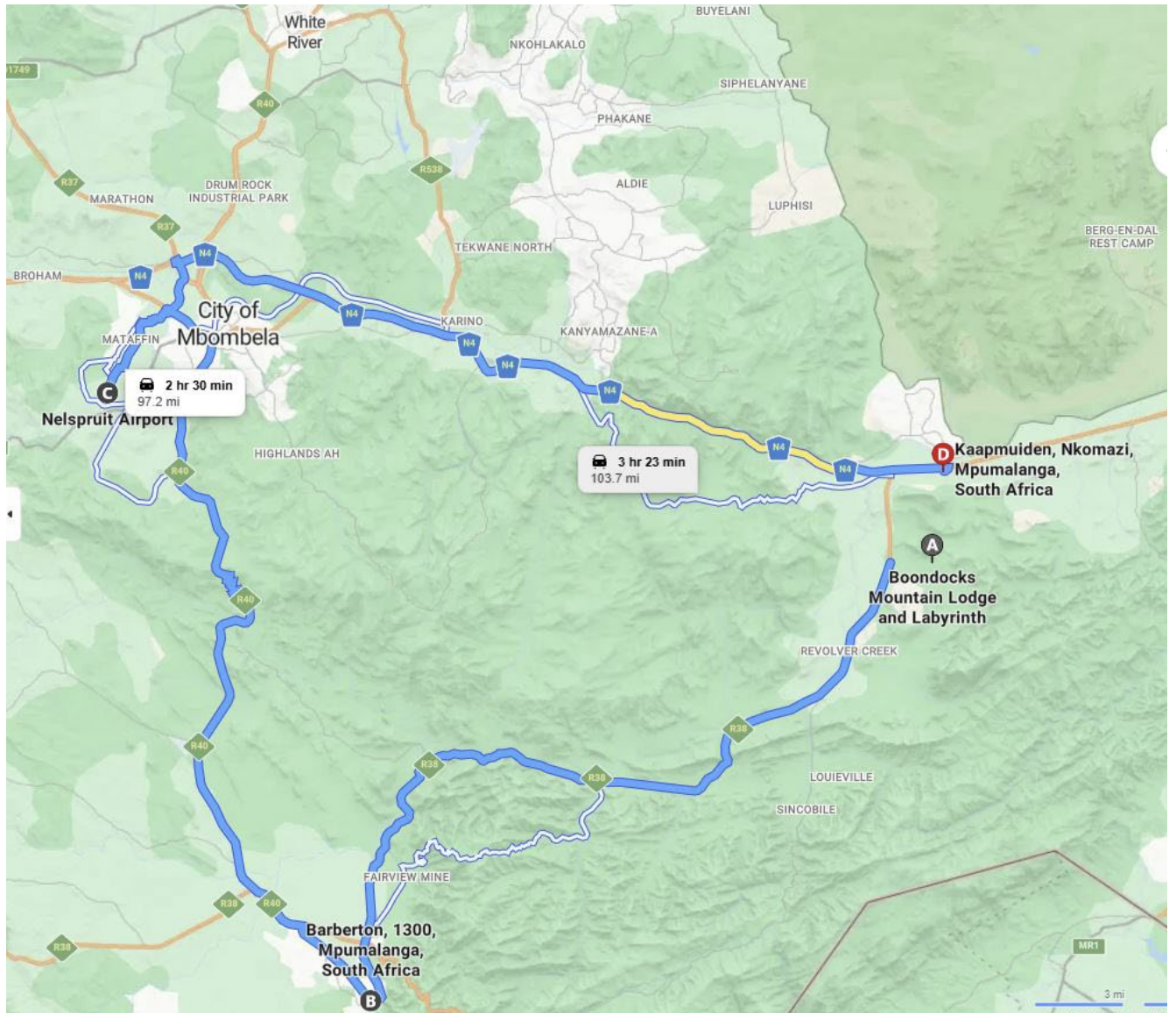
- It was another opportunity to spend time in Africa, one of my very favorite places on earth ever since experiencing its land and people during my overland trip across the African continent in 1974-75.
- Meeting up with Stuart again with whom I established a sincere and lasting brotherhood as a result of our work together to keep "King Kong" moving forward every day to Nairobi in 1974-75. [*Travels with King Kong – Overland across Africa*] And having met Ann, his new soulmate, I established a connection with her that remains even now!
- On a final and very sad note, several years ago after my visit with him at Boondocks, Stuart died of a sudden heart attack on his way back to Boondocks from Kaapmuiden. As I write these notes, I still miss him! He was like the brother to me that I never had – thank you and rest in peace Stuart!!











Boondocks and surrounding towns



PHOTO GALLERY



View from Boondocks garden



Boondocks lodge



Boondocks garden pool



the lodge



Gazelle

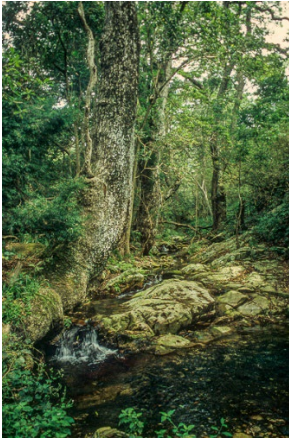


Three Sisters Mountains





Boondocks Nature Reserve



Boondocks Nature Reserve



The lodge veranda



Bungalow #1



Country store in White River