The Sandalwood Box

(Part 1)

BERG VELDT AND RIVER

(boyhood memories including the first journey down the Orange river)

by

Peter Gibbs

Give to me the life I Love,

Let the lave go by me,
Give the jolly heaven above

And the byway nigh me.
Bed in the bush with stars to see,
Bread I dip in the river -
There's the life for a man like me
There's the life for ever.

(From The Vagabond by R.L.S.)

PREFACE

In the unlikely event that this narrative of enjoyable adventure in southern Africa that took place forty six years ago is considered of interest outside the immediate family circle, I dedicate the story to the memory of my parents who gave me free reign to be independent from an early age and in spite of impossibly full commitments at home, every support in prayers and letters and the making of equipments and clothes and sharing adventures with a fond sense of humour, also to the memory of 'Stockie' whose tales of the voyage of the little black ant probably influenced me more than she envisaged; and to the memory of the brave and eccentric Mrs Molteno who risked employing me as a general factotum and sat calmly through situations like flood water running through the cab; to David and Liza Needham who made the Orange River journey enormous fun; and lastly to all the named folk and many not named all down the river who turned it into a journey of hospitality, in particular those still living on the river who have written with news and fond recollections, Dirk Du Plessis at Omdraai, Father Abbe Malery at Pella Mission and Karl Reck at Beauvallon near Alexander Bay.

Part 1

BERG VELDT AND RIVER

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MATABELE MEMOIRS

They say that memory should go back to the third or fourth year. I was still three when we moved from Salisbury, as it was then called, to Bulawayo. Dad was appointed Archdeacon of Matabeleland and St. John's Cathedral of Bulawayo was the centre of this vast parish of two or three generations of Mzilikatze's warriors who had settled around the Matopos hills and been pacified by the colonial police force, and a scattered population of settlers, mostly farmers. I don't know if there was any definite boundary between Matabeleland and Mashonaland but that was an academic point which certainly did not concern my little world and Dad would have crossed any boundary to visit a friend or anyone needing God's blessing. They came out to Rhodesia about *7* years before I was born, when Den was a baby.

But I have memories of Salisbury, memories of Stockie, a loving doting spinster who relieved mum at least twice a week of my boisterous presence to take me out to grand teas of sticky doughnuts and read me stories of elephants, the Little Black Ant, Robinson Crusoe and the Just-So Stories. I can clearly recall her cracked rather croaky voice as I listened enthralled and satiated with treacle buns as she read how the 'elephan' got its trunk on the banks of the great grey green greasy Limpopo river all set about with fever trees, or how the Sun-God Pan turned the yellow dog Dingo into a kangaroo by making him highly sought after across Australia. Brothers Den and John Mike were boarders at Ruzawi, Marandellas, and I recall one visit to the school when JM, about 8, looked to be taking on impressive responsibilities as he had to toll the school bell that hung under a white-washed alcove under the watchful eye of the founder principal, Rev Robert Grinham. The kopjies around the school gave it an impressive wild setting and they told tales and showed collections of early Bushman implements and paintings. Den was the archaeologist and JM the natural history collector, butterflies and eggs. Mary, two years my senior, would have been with us, and who could have foretold then that 28 years of so later we would be back there for the happy occasion of her marriage to Maurice Carver, the co-founder of the school with Rev. Robert Grinham. I mention Stockie as a devoted spoiling influence who wrote to me for years in blue and red ink alternate lines continuing to remind me of things said and done, until she became with mum's reminders part of a developing conscience. 'Have you written to thank Stockie?' she would have to ask. I kept up intermittent communication over the next 26 years when in '62 Judy and I and firstborn Simon, called on her in her little one-bed flat in Salisbury and found an elderly and frail Stockie; but who could still remember back to the little but important events like the adventure of the little black ant. We lived then in 88 Fife Street which I did not remember well except for its red polished floors and a photo given by Den showing me rattling a playpen wanting to get out.

The Bulawayo house I remember better for its trees outside, the large marula tree at the back which overhung the quarters where the servants John Merinda Goma and Elijah lived and the rows of bottle-brush trees in the road verge at the front which were so useful to Mary as starting supports when learning to ride her fairy bike. The house was right opposite the public swimming baths which I frequented and learnt to swim the length of and jump off the top board while still in my third

year; but only because there was a tough and more daring boy of similar age who lived next door. School was about a mile tho' it seemed much further, across pretty wild natural parkland and a bridge across the Machesonslopy river. Mum accompanied the first day and one of 'the boys' was sent to meet me on the way back. Often there were tempting interruptions playing in the river. Sometimes huge swarms of locusts flew down from North Africa darkening the sky. Then everyone would rush out beating tins and trying to drive them on before they stripped all mealie crops and trees bare. The Matabele caught all they could and roasted them over fires. We shot 'catty' stones into the swarm and collected them for John and Elija. JM kept Nagapies (Nightapes) which we looked after when he was at boarding school. Mary and I used to have to go and catch grasshoppers in the park for their nocturnal feeding. They were common as pets then in families of indulgent mothers, carried in a pocket all day and exercised at night when they could clear jump across a room from one picture rail to another. Shirts stained with 'nagapie' wee running down from the bulging top pocket were tell-tale signs. He kept these for some years because they accompanied us down to Cape Town by train on the next move four years later.

Bulawayo was a spacious early colonial town to grow up in with its wide main streets, wide enough to turn a 16-span of oxen, the great park, the river and access into veldt only three miles from the house in those days. We had many close family friends and relations. There was a network of settlers who had come out in the '20s including our cousins Hum and Molly who had built up the farm 'Bonisa' near Redbank siding, Nyamaslovu (which means the meat of the elephant), about 25 miles out of town on the Victoria Falls road. The big spacious thatched-roofed house around a courtyard, the front lawns watered and green overlooking the long dam, the weaver birds' nests in the camelthorn trees, cobras in the woodpile, kudu jumping the fence at night to get into the vegetable garden, the pack of four labradors, tales of the influence of the witch doctor on the kraal of labourers, and of course the unfailing welcome of Hum and Molly, were exciting and fond memories. We went out there many times but the trip I remember best was an unplanned one on a fairy bike at the age of seven. I had been sent up from Cape Town by train, probably to give mum a break as she was expecting Bid, to stay with the Wests. Dr Bill and Bricky West had two sons and the elder, Roger, was a good couple of years my senior. Polio had left him somewhat handicapped but he was game and strong. We were going bird-nesting for swift eggs under the bridges of the Machesonslope, he on his new bike and I on his brother, Tim's fairy bike. With this plan announced to his mother we left town but on the edge of town with the 'strips' leading out towards Redbank we changed our destination. It was a test of a long haul and shimmering mirages of the next turn in the road and Roger always ahead. We reached the farm at last but this time to a concerned reception as Molly cranked the old telephone on the wall to get the exchange and contact Bricky West to say that we were safe and not drowned in the Machesonslopy which had flooded in a local thunderstorm. Roger's father drove out to get him back, caned him and gave him at least 4 collects to learn by heart. I stayed on a couple of days with Jeremy and Nigel, the eldest boys, Jeremy a few months younger than myself. They had a strict after-lunch rest period when I used to steal outside and one day watched a green boomslang in the camelpod tree by the kitchen garden.

About the same distance from town the other side was Cyrene mission that Ned Patterson founded. He taught the natives excellent furniture making, carving and art in a Christian atmosphere. Ned was a 'cowboy' missionary who always carried his ‘45’ in the car glove box to pot at guinea-fowl crossing the road. When Den was about 12 he shot his first Duiker at Cyrene and mounted the little horns. Later Nigel married Ned's daughter Mary. I am reminded of the innate skill and craftsmanship of the natives whenever I open the sandalwood box which is just the right size for the diaries and journals formerly scattered in odd boxes. This came to Cyprus through a trading family dealing in Africana art and just at the time I had started to delve back and write memoirs for my own amusement. The box is craftmanship art at its best of elephants, rhino, deer, trees and rock and will continually remind me of the magic of the 'bush' and the wonderful friendliness of many Africans from childhood to surveying in Northern Rhodesia, Bechuanaland and Ghana in later years. I wish only that I had met the craftsman to thank him more for his work.

Coming in to town on visits occasionally was 'Bulawayo' Smith whose home was a double-decker bus with shelves of books lining the downstairs and sleeping quarters upstairs. He was excellent on the mouthorgan and could play an octave with no hands while driving. He must have influenced my early accomplishment of the 'fluitjie'. What he did for a living I don't know but he was always most welcome.

Farming was not a life for the landed colonial gentry and drought seasons could ruin you. I stayed with the Hawksleys on their farm one holiday. Mum had told me what a struggle they were having, apart from the fact that their eldest, John, like Roger West and Nigel Gibbs had been crippled by polio, they lived on the bare bread line but without apparently harbouring regrets, as dry years brought them down to a donkey cart to get the daily milk churn to the road side. Their house was simple pole-and-daga. We went everywhere by bike. I often later wondered how these folk raised the school fees for two boys through Bishops as she milked the cows and churned butter in the mud dairy shed.

We went camping in the old Auburn car, which Dad loved to tune up, always with some misgivings from Mum, down to Birchenough bridge. One night we heard soft padding outside and we all thought a lion was padding around. Dad took the shotgun and a torch and discovered it was a giant toad! Mary and I were relieved. Near encounters with lion were still ahead. Until then I had only seen the skin and head in the Bonisa sitting room.

Our stay in Bulawayo only lasted about four years because Dad accepted a posting to be rector of St. Saviour's, Claremont. We said goodbye to John and Elija and made the journey down by train, accompanied by the Nightapes. It was a sensible move for family schooling as Den and JM had started at ‘Bishops', Diocesan College, with its avenue of tall pines which elicited the oft quoted comment from Den (referring to Ruzawi's eucalyptus) 'I prefer the gums myself!' Mary too was coming up for more formal schooling and Herschel was under a mile one way while Bishops was two the other way. Den stayed boarding while JM biked daily. This rectory with its large wild garden sitting under the shadow of Table Mountain was

heaven-sent for exploration but more of this in a moment as it was not long before I was packed off for a return visit to Bulawayo to stay with the Wests and I am pretty sure that Bid's imminent arrival was part of the plan. I am sure I went willingly along with it after a token protest about memorising Sunday collects.

Cape Town station was thronging with people. The train had two steam engines up front to take us over the Hex River pass, all the brass parts polished and clouds of steam issued out of the pistons drowning goodbyes and enveloping the bystanders. Mum found my compartment of four. I had a top bunk which hinged down and hung by a leather strap. The bunks and seats had hard stuffed green leather with a distinctive smell. A washbasin was fixed to the centre window side and a table could be folded down over it. A sliding door gave access to a corridor and at the ends of each carriage was an open area fenced in by a wooden balustrade connecting across shuffling metal plates to the next carriage. This was great for standing in and getting the full view with wind in the face in spite of the smuts that stung. It was a four-day journey and my second. But this time I was on my own and my imagination was free to wander and take in the succession of scenery through the Cape mountains with the twin engines going, in Stockie's words "I think I can -I think I can I think-I-can" in a slowing rhythm to "I thought I could I thought-I-could" in a quickening rhythm as the clickety clack speeded up at the top of the pass. Hereon it was semi-desert Karoo with stunted little bushes and distinctive little flat-topped kopjies and distant horizons, the plains broken here and there by a windmill, a house and a clump of fruit trees where a trekboer had claimed his land. Someone said "bleak and barren" but to me it was landscape that was casting a spell; every rock and tree its shape and its place, every watercourse a feature and a story. On the second day there was mild excitement as word passed that we would cross the Orange River. The country was more broken with eroded hills and gullies when quite suddenly the clacks changed an octave as the noise was thrown back by steel girders and the whole valley below was filled with islands and trees and numerous streams of muddy water pushing their way between with branches dragging in the current. It was an exciting scene of contrast which may have stored an early thought of further adventure. This place was appropriately called 'Fourteen Streams'. An Afrikaaner said to his vrouw 'Die groot rivier loop'. Beyond the river valley we passed through a section of the Free State where Karoo bush gave way to grasslands and then into Bechuanaland through Mafeking, Lobatsi, a number of sidings in the night where Tswana children would greet the train and reach up with beautifully carved animals and strings of beads, knobkerries and assegais, hoping for a sale. And so through Francistown on the third day and across the Shashi river into familiar kopjie veldt around Plumtree and finally Bulawayo, where I was met by Mrs King and one of her servants.

Apart from the bike ride with Roger West and the stay on the farm, which left a lasting impression to make it a destination again *7* years later, I remember no detail of this stay except the stern rule that no sticks were to be thrown into the immaculate swimming pool. A gardener was employed full time to rake out jacaranda leaves. Dr King had delivered me into the world and was to do the same for Joanna 26 years later, so keeping in with him seemed a reasonable bargain. His elder daughter Valerie, great friends with Mary, nearly came to a fatal end in our

garden at Claremont, an incident worth recalling next chapter. But they, the Wests and the Gibbs at Bonisa were like second families in those Matabele days.

ST. SAVIOUR'S CLAREMONT

The old rectory just across Newlands road from the parish church was what any adventurous 7-year old would find a paradise beyond expectation. You entered through metal gates always open, where an Oleander bush grew with its flowering branches hanging wildly over the gate post, up a spacious gravel drive which circled around a Norfolk pine at least 150 feet high up which grey squirrels scrambled to safe branches, the single storey house with its corrugated iron covered verandah, partly overgrown with jacaranda stood above a flight of steps a few yards from the Norfolk pine. The garden to the far side of the house and behind and to the left of you, as you entered, was so big with many tall oaks and other trees, and a bamboo thicket, that it took some days to explore its nooks and crannies.

The back of the house faced a wall that adjoined what I will call Herschel road because it led to that school that Mary went to and entered Newlands road at right angles enclosing the rectory. Newlands road ran up slope southwards to Table Mountain. You could view it as you walked up from the church, or if you squinted out of mum and dad's bedroom window on the west side of the house past the loquat tree that cast its shadows into the room. It was a massive backdrop rising 3500 feet up just 2 miles off with Devils peak on the right and the green vegetated crags rising above the gullies behind Protea and Kirstenbosch. We always looked out to see what the weather was doing or going to do by the type and level of cloud and direction. The northwesters brought rainclouds over that dropped their content on this side of the mountain giving the slopes a luxuriant forest look, whereas the southeasters brought clear weather with often a white tablecloth over the mountain and great for flying kites, but it was a dry wind and if fires had started on the mountain it would fan the flames through the pine plantations and do terrible damage.

The house was single storey around a courtyard. Concrete steps led up to a verandah roofed by curved corrugated iron (that crashed down one night in a strong southeaster). The front door opened to a hall with a large sitting room left and dad's study right. I had a bed in the back of the hall which was quite a public passageway so the number of rooms must have been limited. Around to the right was mum and dad's room opposite the loquat tree which cast its shadows on the wall from the street lamp outside. Bid, as a baby, slept in that room and I remember it moderately clearly with its photographs on the dresser and watercolours of Aldenham, and the little picture of mum's favourite Wittenham Clumps. A passage led around past, I think, Mary's room. It turned a corner with the angle of the house serving a maid's room and the kitchen and a back door. A large dining room was connected by a passage and looked out onto a wisteria covered trellis. The courtyard had bunks for Den and JM, Mary and I when the weather was warm and fine. I cannot recall any special 'boys' room. But there was a room of books in petrol boxes and some very fine old volumes there were, originals of David Livingstone's travels with gory pictures of him being mauled by lion and fighting the slave traders and other books like Hendick Van Loon's Story

of Mankind, Kipling's Jungle Book and Just So Stories. Den was boarding at Bishops and JM biked there as a day boy.

Mostly it was a friendly family house but the maid's room was haunted by an evil spirit. Big Lizzie and Little Lizzie from Protea, the pretty coloured settlement 2 miles away up the mountain road, worked to help with meals and housework and I think it was Little Lizzie that slept in this room and complained of a 'presence' grabbing her around the throat. So mum slept there one night and described awfully how she was wakened up struggling for breath with a force around her throat. Dad said the service of exorcism in the room and after that there was no more problem. We were all attuned to the possibility of spirits living among us, not only the Holy Trinity whose daily influence directed the spiritual life of dad making him as saintly a person as one could imagine it possible to be, although not as 'other worldly' as his brother, my uncle, Tom, whose life was continual prayer; but as part of Sunday afternoon family readings he would choose, with our excited approval, books like 'The Most Haunted Houses in Britain' where poltergeists threw things around and ghosts abounded. Ghosts were credible good and bad. There was a picture in the lavatory, where the timid child is saying goodnight to nanny and asking if there are any ghosts near so that she need not fear and please don't turn out the light; but the main influence was indeed the benign loving spirits of mum and dad and greater fortune no child could have.

There was a second Norfolk pine on the edge of the lawn where the readings were held on fine Sunday afternoons, and from this I erected a cableway wire running down across the lawn to an oak tree. A piece of pipe on the wire gave a handhold and the trick was to launch yourself holding your chin up to the level of the hands and shoot down the wire. The near tragedy occurred to Janet King when they came down to holiday from Bulawayo. She swung her body out with arms full stretched and couldn't hold her weight. Mary and I were horrified as she came down flat on her back from about 12 feet and lay there winded. Happily she recovered alright. Her father Dr King must have wondered how safe they were in our 'Outward Bound' company. I mentioned that he delivered me into the world and co-incidentally Joanna, in Bulawayo 31 years later also, an event I shall describe in a later chapter.

Dad being the vicar and giving out a reputation for help to the 'down and outs' we had quite a number of regulars who called. There was 'Oleander' Smith, named after the bush at the gate because he plucked a flower for his button hole to allay the smell of meths on his breath. Aubrey Lewis was a whiskey man who had always had bad luck at the races and wanted a ticket to the Salvation Army. The most persistent and a bit dangerous because he smoked daggha, was Kelly, a coloured man with possibly some zulu blood in him. He was the cause of the only occasion I remember when dad lost his temper. Two or three times he had refused to give him money as he was drunk, he kept coming up the steps, he (dad) had a sermon to prepare, he gave him a straight left and knocked him clean down the steps. It did far more damage to dad's conscience than Kelly's jaw but it spread the spirit of Onward Christian Soldiers and the gentlemen of the road learnt more respect from then on.

School for me was initially "Wet Pups", Western Province Preparatory School, about a mile and a half up the 'mountain road. It was a private school with a cross-section of teachers who kept order by various punitive means. There was a lot of rough and tumble, gangs and crazes. We were taught boxing in which I excelled one parent's evening by knocking out Michael Robson who later became head of British Steel and married Cathy Jarmin from Chester. I also found I could jump higher than others (thanks to height) and throw things a good distance (thanks to long arms). But thankfully I was not a boarder to experience the night wanderings of the inebriated headmaster, one St Ledger Smith, the leaked news of which caused mum and dad and other parents to withdraw their sons and find a place at Bishops Prep. One of the crazes was marbles; to win other marbles you needed a metal ball bearing called a 'goon'. A day I remember in class was having to put my hand up and effectively stop the lesson with Please Sir, I put a 'goon' in my ear and I cannot get it out!". I was taken to the Sanatorium where the Sister had never had to deal with this situation before. But it was solved with a strong magnet.

Before this move of school, the mountains of the Cape had started to exert a strong influence. We had family days up the mountain, usually though Kirstenbosch gardens and up Skeleton Gorge. One day, an outing with mum and dad, Mary and the Barings (Sir Evelyn and Lady Mary - whom we always took off with her marble-in-the-mouth accent - but they were charming people) we were climbing slowly up to Maclear's Beacon where the annual service of thanksgiving was held. We were resting at the top of the gorge when old Jan Smuts, then in his 70s and leaning on his long forked stick, came by and remarked with a twinkle in his blue eyes "Nice to see young boys enjoying the berg!'. Later I read books like *Commando* by Denys Reitz and always admired this remarkable man tho' with all the injustices against the Boers by the British before and during the Boer war, I could never really understand why he changed allegiance and gave his intellect and support to the British government.

I owe a lot to the Curate at St Saviour's, Ted Langmore, who lived a couple of doors down opposite the church. He took parties of us youngsters in the choir off into the Hottentot's Holland mountains and Bain's Kloof for long week-end camps. At the age of about 10 or 11 he led a Cedarberg trip with donkeys to carry our supplies. This was real trekking and we loved it, the heat and dust of Algiers where the donkeys were loaded and their drivers engaged, the ziz-zag trek up the slope to cooler 'vlagtes about 3000' up and the winding path to Chrystal Pool where you swam off the dust and slaked a thirst; next day onto a cave under Tafel berg where billies were placed under a dripping stone to catch enough water. The climb up to the top for sunrise, the highest mountain yet at 6500' with views right across rugged range after range. Then across to a hut near the Maltese Cross, a sandstone sculpted to this formation by wind and weather through ages and loved by baboons for a look-out. Down into Swart Andries place in the valley, brother of Wit Andries some miles away, and a long trek back to Algiers. Ted showed the way and there were very many schoolboy expeditions of our own that followed that first one. My Brownie box camera took some shots which remind me of this bit of treasured wilderness and the smell of cedarwood in the carved porridge spoon. There were leopards occasionally seen in the Cedarberg and this fuelled

imagination as we sat around the fires at night but never saw one. There was talk of a leopard looking in the door of the tent and frightening two lady trekkers. It was the kind of country you could associate with leopards and baboons on the kranzes, in the caves, on great big branches of the old half dead cedar trees.

So it was not surprising that with the move to Bishops Prep at the age of about ten I soon gathered around me friends interested in weekend or longer trips into the Cape Mountains providing their parents approved. There was no mountain club. We made our own plans and arrangements tho' often a parent would drive us to a departure point, or we hitched lifts. James Duncan, Tim Russell, Bennie Eaton, Guy Cowper, Wopper Watson all joined me on one trip or another over the next few years; but mostly they dropped out due to my unpopular wish to have extended days on the mountain, or try new routes and not laze around rock pools. James survived my company much better than others perhaps because we shared the same practical joke and Bertie Wooster sense of humour. He was and remains lean and wiry as a Tibetan porter, never lost a boxing match which did no good to his harelip and squashed nose, and he could throw a ball further and straighter than anyone else, which got him into the first eleven at 15. So we did a number of climbs and treks together. He was not addicted to steep rock but seconded me up Africa face on Table Mountain once and we climbed all the Cedarberg tops and Sneeuberg and left a rugby tour of Natal after the last game against Michael House to climb in the Drakensberg for a few days. I vividly recall a trek up a ziz-zag path in the Cedarberg keeping in rhythm with his mountain boots and seeing his trailing boot pass over a thick coiled puffadder asleep on the path. In spite of this he still goes every year to this day. On a trip with Wopper Watson we did a 4-day round of the Cedarberg tops during our JC year during which I ate no food, to see what the effect was. I had been reading Spencer Chapman'*s The Jungle is Neutral* and had read and re-read books on the Himalaya by Frank Smythe and polar exploration particularly Scott's two expeditions where rations, fitness and endurance were so related and to me a subject of fascinating experiment. These books were all part of a collection that Mum had. As a result I did not find a kindred spirit to share my yen for slightly extended circumstances until my matric year when fellow high-jumper David Needham did a trip with me, of which more later, so most of my outings were on my own.

I have skipped one of the family highlights at St Saviours around 1946 I may have been 12, and Mary 14. Aunt Blanche, a maiden aunt of dad's had died and left the grand sum of 500 pounds in her will to him. Dad was always a car enthusiast; the old Austin was troublesome and this opportunity was heaven sent. Willys Jeep had brought out a new safari model utility with windows all around and economical at 15 hp. One morning this shining gleaming 'Aunt Blanche' was delivered and we packed up and set off on the best family holiday I can remember. But JM and Den must have remained at boarding school. First night was near Bloemfontein camping under gum trees and icy cold at night. The radiator froze and the car boiled after a few miles next morning. We toured through the Kruger Park camping at the rest houses. The car was ideal for game viewing and I was allowed to drive in the reserve! It was north of the reserve after we had crossed the Limpopo that we had the magnificent sight of a huge Eland come out of the bush gather himself

and take a terrific leap right over the road and the car. We looked up the white bearded father founder of Penalonga mission; we stayed at Bonisa on the farm with Hum and Molly; looked up all old contacts between Bulawayo and Salisbury and stayed with the Grinham's at Ruzawi. It was a 6-week trip and back through the Garden route and the Tsitsikama forest where elephant were reported but not seen.

We had a number of musical evenings at the Rectory at which friends were invited. But always the Hermans were there. She had a very good soprano voice and sang duets with Dad with Mum on the piano. There was a repertoire point of Dad's old Irish songs “On yonder hill there lived a maiden" or was it called "No John, No John, No”?, which Mrs Hermans sang so well to Dad's "Will you marry me?". Other favourites were “Och Sure There's Not Another Gal Could Put yer Heart in Such a Wirl”, which he sang in Irish brogue "Drink to me Only With Thine Eyes", "Clementine" and the "Campdown racetrack”. Christmas was a time for carols including always "Good King Wenceslas" where I sang the page boy's part.

During the war years we had sailors staying at times while their ships were in harbour. They slept most of the day and gadded about at night after girls. I am sure they appreciated the hospitality.

Shortly after Dad accepted the position of Dean of St Georges Cathedral, Cape Town, so we moved to the Deanery in Orange Street, on the edge of the suburban area called Orangezicht, above the city of Cape Town on the North slope of the mountain.

THE DEANERY CAPETOWN

This was a large Victorian house two storeys with a front verandah and upstairs verandah also, at least 4 bedrooms upstairs, large sitting room (left) and study (right) of the central entrance door, a large kitchen and a couple of out rooms at the back. The room giving access to the upstairs verandah bacame a simple family prayer-room. My room on the east side upstairs, shared with a school lodger called Michael Brown in term time, overlooked a bit of kitchen garden and the Sac's boarding house. It was built squarely in about an acre of ground, again like St Saviour's having some large trees at the back including a beehive in an oak. Much of the garden was unkempt wild yard. Next door to the right was a 4-storey old-folks home and to the left was a residential home for Sac's school boarders. Rommel, the apartheid-trained terrier-sealyum that we had taken over, patrolled the 50 yard front steel girder fence which bordered Orange Street. About 250 yards only across the road the main Avenue led through the Cape Town gardens down to the cathedral, a pleasant 10 minute fast walk to church or 20 minutes to get a train from the station, which was normal for getting to school, except when Prof Pollard (who taught at the university) gave us a lift in his citroen.

From Orange Street and taking Hof Street upslope to the right, St Cyprian's school was about a mile where Bid went (while Mary continued at Herschel in Claremont) and walking a further mile through forest you could get onto the north slopes of Table Mountain to the east of the pass over to Camps Bay separating Lion's Head. This was very handy for Sunday climbs after church.

The house was good for activities with a cricket net at the back where Dad bowled me the occasional over. This must have given the old people a spectacle at last until, unfortunately, one ball went right through a window and caused them to be covert spectators. The balustrade on the upstairs balcony, where we slept on summer nights, was creaky but did support an abseil rope, and the high stone wall on the one side afforded short climbs. These climbing skills were taught me by John Ball, a friend of JM's who stayed once, having done some climbing in the Alps. I bought a 50' hemp rope and did a lot of practise often on my own. But some very enjoyable days on the mountain were thanks to Prunella Albers who tragically lost her second husband on the Mountain in an accident, where the going was easy although exposed and did not justify a rope. Dad helped to recover her faith in herself and the meaning of life and death which she refers to in her book (called M*ovement is Life).* She loved climbing and moved gracefully and in balance. To her, movement and fitness were extolled in her twinkling smile and graceful poised movement. Fate dealt her repeated hard blows in her married life. Her first husband, Douglas Hamilton, was killed in a crash landing flying back home at the end of the war leaving her with two young sons a couple of years younger than me and too young then to enjoy climbing.

She bred white bull-terriers and from her I had successively three. "Dassie' a cross with a ridgeback survived a few walks in Bains Kloof but was still a pup of about 6 months when Mum broke the news as I came back from school that she had been run over in Orange Street. She was replaced by 'Fortis' a pedigree white whose

short but active and enjoyable life was ended on another day up the mountain. I frequently climbed with him training him to wait on ledges while I soloed' ahead, took a belay and supported his scrabbles up to join me. If the pitch was too steep I would haul him up, the rope secured to his harness. This was a day up Kloof Corner when he slipped out of his harness and fell some 20 feet onto hard rocks. He was coughing blood as I carried him running down the mountain to a vet who, some two hours later, failed to stop the haemorrhage. Another loss another lesson and replaced again by Prunella by Bill (short for Biltong) who shared adventurously most of my last year in South Africa:

The move to the Deanery roughly coincided with my move from Bishop's Prep to the College. It was a reasonably occupied period from the start, having to be at the school gates early to carry my fagmaster's case from the gates to his classroom, after about an hour's journey by bus and train and most afternoon's having sport or training that lasted up to six or so. I had energy to spare after I was fourteen because some days I walked there and back over the pass between Devils Peak and Table Mountain. I climbed Platteklip gorge from the contour path to the top in 20 minutes and used to time myself on various routes. There was no Mountain Club at school then which I expect I would have joined (John-Mike on the staff started one the year after I left) but many holidays were in mountains with James Duncan, Tim Russel and Watson and later David Needham. The Duncans were driving up to Johannesburg one break in the first year and invited me to come as far as that as a good leg on the way to Rhodesia. We were too young to help Mrs Duncan with the long drive across the Karoo and she was too good natured to tell us off for the constantly distracting jokes and tom-foolery which we enjoyed. I hitched on staying a couple of nights on a farm near Nelspruit, whose kind owner, leant me his 12-bore to hunt guinea-fowl. I slept out a couple of nights and finally landed a lift on a tractor to Bonisa farm to stay some days with the cousins. I was anxious one evening when a trio of Africans offered to carry my pack in the northern Transvaal approaching nightfall. Returning via the Garden Route I was camping in a little 2-man silk tent (made of parachute) under the coastal trees near Plettenburg Bay when I was scared stiff by a hand and arm sliding under the skirt. I managed to summons a WHO GOES THERE! convincingly enough as the owner of the arm made off. These occasions apart I had many and varied lifts and unfailing hospitality. A chap in class of practical ability named Zoutenduik, made handguns that fired 22 rounds. I carried one of these (unknown to my parents) more for the purpose of hunting rock-rabbits than self defence. It had a short barrel and firing it on this trip my left index finger was partly over the muzzle with the result that I blew a hole through it luckily only skimming the bone. Shooting for the pot was a skill I enjoyed and was quite good at thanks I suppose to school cadet shooting where under the beady eye of Colonel Hannibal I produced winning targets.

Bishops had its fair range of public school character masters who in their several ways tried, and one has to concede succeeded to a certain extent in imparting an awareness of some of the virtues of a public school education "..'- in spite of one's distraction by the wild veldt life. Our housemaster was ‘Agape’ Irvine, the school chaplain, short quietly spoken and of evident sincere purpose. He earned his

nickname from his first sermon on the subject of LOVE *(*Greek Agapo) as meant by the scriptures, and not LERVE as invited by Greta Garbo and the Hollywood set. Coincidentally his face and round eyes were not unlike the Nagapie. His wife, well endowed up top, bravely gave dancing lessons, trying to teach us awkward adolescents to avoid tramping on their partners toes if we were to succeed in the social graces. There was 'Piley' Rees who took the 1st 15 rugby, thin, gaunt, with hooked nose (he was also called "The Beak') whose presence was preceded by a waft of pipe smoke, and who in spite of appearing to have a physique that would collapse in walking across a rugby field, would be up with the scrum and every foul, blowing vigorously into his whistle to gasp and point at the offender. Colonel Hannibal was the military man *par excellence*. Hunched back like Napoleon, moustache like Eisenhower with an ego to match, polished belt and Sambrown on Wednesdays - cadet day - which he lived for. He took Latin and you could hear a pin drop in his classes. We had to read Latin poetry fragments of which a little remains like the story of Daedalus and Icarus escaping from Crete by Catullus, thanks to his disciplined methods. On the other hand Mr. Sergeant who took us for English in the last two years did instil an appreciation of poetry and Shakespeare without the steely eye and cane. Gym was taken by Salmy a north countryman who lived at the gate house and had two alsatians. He would come out with favourite sayings such as 'Aye Lud yer couldna kee step wi a wheel barter or pull a sausage off a greezee playt!". Zoology was taken by Syfie, a dear chap who had absolutely no control over the class and was so diverted by his own piles that general hubbub reigned. It was however, my only scientific subject apart from maths which never progressed beyond arithmetic, but it naturally interested me so in spite of wrestling with Tim Russel through much of his lessons I managed to pass in it. School music was of a high standard thanks to Brown. I joined the choral society for a time and we had fun singing the Messiah in the chapel. He lived for music, conducting vigorously and sweating profusely pulling out a hanky frequently to mop his brow. Afrikaans was taken by Frickie Valjoen, Mostly his lessons were reading in turn stories of the Boer war. I often wondered whose side he really was on as I felt very sympathetic to the Boers and their rightful claim to the Transvaal and Free States. But politics were not discussed, only repetitive jokes at the expense of Felix Faure among others. Whenever it was his turn to answer a question Viljoen would joke 'Nou Ja Faure van Faure met Fortyfore mistakes!' (Faure was the place in the Karoo where they farmed). Afrikaans was compulsory. During one holiday in JC I went to stay on an Afrikaans farm near Stellenbosch with a traditional family in an old Cape Dutch style house. With hitch-hiking and meeting many others one became reasonably 'tweetalig? (bilingual) at this time.

I enjoyed athletics - the field events highjump, shot, discuss and javelin. Long legs and arms gave me advantage so I won these events except the shotput beaten by a chap called Thompson and broke records in two of them. The training and theory was all taken very seriously as was all sports. We had a pleasant enthusiastic sports master from Loughborough College whose name I forget but he loved to talk on the latest theories, where your centre of gravity was and how the 'straddle' was better than the western roll' and the 'scissors', warming up training etc. The changing rooms reeked of wintergreen. There was strong inter-house competition for the heats and Sports day and interschool matches. Sports day itself was always

well attended by parents and school with teas and event by event announcements ending with a prizegiving of cups. I enjoyed this more than the melee of rugby tho' that too was of a very high standard for school rugby where Bishops seldom if ever lost a match and many players like Tommy Gentles and David Eaton went on to play for the Springboks. Many became Blues too. Tommy had been at school with me since Wet pups. He played scrum half. He was short and exceptionally fast. Our ear-wrenching job in the scrum was to push like mad over the ball until he could pick it up and dive pass it out to Bennie Eaton at flyhalf, and on to Dave Needham or John Cumming at wing; or dummy and quick as anything dash around the blind side of the scrum and start a short pass run with the forwards. Come to think of it we had tremendous fun in spite of the pileups. I scrummed front row or lock forward pairing up with Julian Thompson, also my height, and Johns as hooker. Little did I know it then that Julian would later become head of de Beers and we would read of his policy statements on the world diamond market. James played wing forward and showed us all the devastating results of a low tackle when his opposite number had the ball. Rugby was coached also by Mr Brett who wore long English shorts to his knees, a very pleasant master who missed little except on his blind side as he had lost an eye in the war, it was rumoured. Playing for the first 15 also provided the opportunity to go on tour and visit the other main schools in South Africa and Rhodesia. One such trip by train included Michael House in Natal where we were rather astonished to be served porridge for supper. Perhaps it was a reputation for spartan living that Spencer Chapman had introduced as head master tho' I cannot recall his years, but he became a hero of mine for feats of endurance about this time when I read 'The Jungle is Neutral' a book mum had, and later I read about his exploits with Gino Watkins in Greenland. We played against a school near the Howick falls and gazed in wonder at the cascade which apparently had claimed the life of an unfortunate first year boy. This was the trip around June 1952 when James and I left the train in Natal for a few days climbing at Mont Aux Sources. It was cold up at 10,000 feet with hard night frost. We had leather lumber jackets but never wore longs or jerseys as one was generally not clad for cold weather. A year later I was to be back there with David on a trip for which plans were actively being made in my mind then and had been for a year or so before.

There were a number of visitors to Sunday lunch; tea, or staying longer, Frank Smythe's wife I remember because Mum had several of his books on the Himalayas which I had read and loved his photographs and descriptions. Colleagues of Den and JM like Mike Ball and George Low joined me in days on the mountain. One chap in the air force, who made a good cabinet for the records, remembered affectionately his stay as he had lost touch with the Gibbs and some 27 years later was luckily heard by John Paisley in Aviemore sending out a message on Charlie Chester's show to put people in touch. He remembered affectionately the great kindnesses he had received as one of the Gibbs family then, Musical evenings continued with the Hermans, the Tiarks, Roseveares and John and Pam Aubrey who lived in the cottage next door. John Aubrey was the Precentor at the Cathedral. He and Pam were game for outings in their Chevrolet with an open coupe in the back. We did one day trip to a picnic spot in Baine's Kloof when Dassie was a puppy. It involved a couple of hours walk each way but this day the weather

turned foul, cold and wet and foggy. I did what I could to keep up their damp spirits as it was a trial for Pam not used to mountain conditions. But we made it back to the hotel where we dried out and warmed up over a fire.

In 1949 we did a trip to UK by the Intermediate Line which was the first return Mum and Dad had made for some 12 years, the previous one including the celebrated Isle of Wight reunion when I was 3. Bid did not accompany us on this staying with the Roseveares. Den and JM were already at Keble college, Oxford. The boat trip of 3 weeks was fun via St Helena, where we played the island at cricket, and Madeira. As a family we dressed up and won a performance of Oliver Twist, Dad as Fagan with a long straw beard, Mary as Mary, myself as Oliver being taught how to pick-pocket and Mum playing another character. Sadly if I kept any diary notes they are lost but some photos remain to recall the immensely enjoyable time visiting relations and Den and JM. There were visits to Aunt Joan and Uncle Victor living on the beech-wooded ridge at Chinnor. TV had just been invented and he had one. He kept pigs in a sty to augment the war time rationing of meat that was still in force. Lucia was a baby girl. Uncle Den was commandant at Eton Hall where we found him dressing down some sloppy cadets in the drive, he standing rigidly upright "You will never make a soldier! What What?" instilling terror and respect into them and changing as suddenly to his laughing self as he saw us. It was at Mount Edgecumbe, guests of Uncle and Aunt Fan (parents of Aunt Laire) that we could really relax and enjoy the family with beach picnics and cliff walks, games of “kick-the-tin' with hoots of 'What What and Ha Ha and “I see you behind that rhododendron' and gales of laughter as Jill, Margy, Rozzie, Lel, Mary or I raced to kick the tin. Staying in the converted stables, since the main house was bombed, were a number of other relatives on the Edgcumbe side. Bedrooms overlooked the stable courtyard. I was privileged to have access to Uncle Fan's gun room and could sleep out in a tent by the ruins of the old house to shoot the early morning rabbits. Uncle Den liked a shoot too, beating through thickets and urging Tamil the spaniel to put up a pheasant or rabbit. Although a stables it was commodious, especially the main dining room where we ate in style served by a delightful butler whose name escapes, but like the traditional Jeeves. We of the younger generation, but including Uncle Tom, would help with the washing up and cleaning of the silver. Uncle Tom led the singing of songs like “ten - green bottles' and 'Widdicumbe Fair". Aunt Laire organised or perhaps they just happened, musical evenings, reels or charades in the Blue Room. One day we went to Cothele, also their property, later given to the NT. Running back for a catch here I fell into the circular pond. We spent a few days also at the McCauslands at Drenagh, near Limavady in Ulster, another welcoming glimpse of a large country house. On mum's side Aunt Jean and Uncle John with their two Penny and Andy shared the cottage Quakers Corner with Aunt Ella at this time. How long all these pleasant visits lasted I do not remember but I had to catch a boat back on my own no doubt to meet a school date. At any rate it was an excellent introduction to the welcoming wider family I would see three years later.

The idea of a journey down the Orange started when I was about 15 and I am sure its inception was magnified with the story telling of Lawrence G. Green "To the Rivers End first published by Howard Timmins in 1948. He also wrote 'Lords of the

Last Frontier which likewise was packed with tales of intrepid characters who spent their lives in the remote areas of Bushmanland, the Richtersveld and the Namib. As no-one had traversed the length of the river let alone put a boat on any stretch of it other than to cross it, it seemed to me an obvious trip waiting to be done and pre-occupied much of my thoughts in the last couple of years at school. One of the alcohol cases living with us at the Deanery in 49 was a one-time petty officer in the RN - Tommie Hassle. He was a splendid tough character of the RN school born in Falmouth and joined the navy as a seaman at the age of 15 or so, torpedoed and shot up in the war which left him luckily with his life but one leg solid at the knee. His age must have been then late 40s. He had come down from Rhodesia where he could not hold his job as a groundsman at Whitestones due to his drink problem. In the evenings in the kitchen I would talk to him about plans for the river, the design of boat, the guns we would need. He was determined to come and the project gave him enthusiasm, fanciful tho' it seems now. His catch phrase was "You've got to be tough, Master Peter'. Indeed I am sure types like him were the sinews of the navy and went through hellish times during the war. But drink had its hold on him still. He slept in the Precentor's cottage, when the Aubreys were away, and one evening when he had not turned up in the kitchen I went across to find him in bed and stiff as a board I thought he was dead. But he breathed and smelt of Cape Brandy! But Mary tells me that he was rehabilitated and returned to Falmouth alright and was put in touch with uncle Den and aunt Laire at Roborough. Another character at this time was Bob Scott, a coloured (tho' passed as poor white) who had been a champion boxer. He was also a rehabilitation case who knew all the underworld of the Cape Town docks area and had fought his way out of trouble spots. They were both good company. To them I was a bridge between respectability and the rough and outcast. It may have given them a bit of a lift up. I was fond of them and admired some of their characteristics and I am sure that when funking later situations I would remember Tommie's catch phrase.

It was David who volunteered to join me on the river journey. We did a Cedarberg trip together some holiday in early '52 when he was in Post Matric. Although new to mountains and trekking he showed great endurance and loved the challenges. He loved the wild, the camp fires, the rugged eroded landscape as did I. He admired the heroic age of exploration. We discussed the Antarctic a good deal, those shining examples of courage and character in 'The Worst Journey in the World' by Apsley Cherry Garrard. David loved good writing and poetry. When I left for the Antarctic 4 years later he gave me a leather bound volume of 'Sixteen Poets' highly treasured since and typical of him. We derived immense amusement out of situations and what other people said. Life was always amusing and challenges were fun. Our parents must have viewed this plan with some dismay, but in spite of some pretty dire warnings from people like Senator Butler who knew the river at Upington, that it was a mad idea, they gave us all support. David and his elder sister Jenny lived at Goodwood where his father was a doctor and David intended to follow that profession. I never saw a lot of them but I was made very welcome when I did call in. One occasion was late about 11:00 at night at the end of a long bike ride all the way from the Cedarberg, about 180 miles, when at

Paarl I had decided to go on in the dark across the Cape Flats. What a meal she cooked quite out of the blue.

At the Deanery some tom foolery nearly caused David serious damage. I had made a large capacious rucsac for all the supplies we would need to carry across Basutoland (David had the money to buy a large Bergen and was helping finances by working at Markham's clothes store). To demonstrate its size I invited him to get inside which he did with his knees drawn up and I tied the top draw strings leaving just his head out. Swinging it up onto my back I lost my balance - not too surprising at 175. pounds perhaps - but unfortunately David's head hit the floor hard and he was momentarily knocked out. Our friendship remained intact, surprisingly.

The last few months of '52 were very busy with matric exams besides this advance planning for the river journey. It was made clear that a place at Keble College Oxford in October '53 was not entirely a matter of succession through the Gibbs line and playing good rugby; a reasonable pass including Latin was necessary. This forward planning was out of my hands and untold thanks are due to arrangements made by my father and mother. I was living too much in the present to give thought to Oxford. The next 9 months after school had to be financed. Also to distract attention and add a new dimension to this exciting time was Liza Goldschmidt who waited at the same bus-stop and enjoyed some days climbing on the mountain. We became close friends and she helped in many ways machining food bags and sleeping bag covers. She was involved in all the planning. We named the boat after her, bought for 12 pounds from someone in Fishhoek. It had beautiful graceful lines, Indian canoe uplifting bow and stern, 16' long and 4'6" wide. But it was made of thin tin sheet rivetted over a timber frame. We had doubts about its strength and set to re-inforcing the structure with hessian sacking bituminised and several coats of paint.

School ended in December with a week of exams, speech day prize giving, exhortation by Mr Kidd (much admired headmaster) to be honest hardworking citizens etc etc and be proud of Bishops. I was not sorry to be leaving, there was too much to do but in spite of rebel thoughts the school had given me much I admired and some friends. It taught endurance of situations that were uncomfortable and modest pride in athletic success and prefect ability. I walked down the avenue of pines, out of the gate past Salmy's lodge gate house and the alsatians and as circumstances determined have never revisited since but the OD magazine keeps one in touch as does the excellent recently produced commemorative volume by John Gardiner 'Bishops 150'. Until reading this I had not realised that the school had started in St. Saviour's Claremont.

Now we had planned to start the river trip in May when the rains had ended and the water would be dropping. There were four months in which to earn money and pack in some adventure if possible. Norwegian whalers were calling then at Cape Town. David and I considered that with interest. Whatever the reason was that we could not be taken on I am very glad in retrospect not to have played any part in the slaughter of whales. It is surprising that then I was not aware of the wholesale slaughter of wildlife that had been going on for the past 100 years. A

farm near Stellenbosch wanted an assistant in the dairy for a month. This was good training for getting up early at 3.30 am to supervise the early milking. One day I lost most of the morning supply through an oversight. I was driving the churns into Stellenbosch in a flatbed pickup and had not secured the back tailgate properly so when rounding a corner a couple of churns fell out and poured contents into the gutter! In spite of this I was paid 20 pounds for the month. That was January. The next 10 weeks were a splendid adventure I was most fortunate to have. Margaret Williamson, later JM's wife, was the attractive grand-daughter of Mrs Molteno, aged approximately 78, whose passion was prospecting in the wild areas of Bushmanland and the Richtersveld. She always engaged a driver cum general camp handyman and employed local coloured helpers who knew the land from Springbok. Would I take this job on? It was brave and generous of her as I could not claim to be a mechanic or have any experience in driving in sand and rock. But it was agreed and I think the pay was 10 pounds a month. I had now taken on Prunella's pup bullterrier of about 4 months called Biltong. Could Bill come along too please and sit in the cab between us? Great stuff let's go! She was partly American, a little deaf and frail - not surprising for her age - but the prospect of a rich claim lit her life. This year she had bought a new Dodge 1- ton pickup with a cab in front and a canvas covered rear platform. It was standard 2-wheel drive as apart from Willys Jeep there were no 4-wheel drives then.

PROSPECTING WITH MRS MOLTENO

(During this trip I kept a daily diary which the following narrative summarises and in so doing refreshes my memory of people and incidents half forgotten. Mrs Molteno, often referred to as "The Old Lady' was the grandmother of Margaret Williamson who married my brother John Mike a year later and so became a sister-in-law. She (Mrs Molteno) had passed through Cape Town as a girl of 20 from her home in America to do a tour of China and saw the Empress of China. Happily a meeting took place with Margaret's grandfather who was so taken by her that he later followed her back to America and proposed. I am told that she always had servants and nannies for the children and never learnt to cook. She was 78 at the time of this journey).

We left Cape Town on Sunday 15th February 1953 well loaded with the Warsop drill and various cases, Bill on the seat between us and Mrs Carol Williamson, Margaret's mother, squeezed beside her mother as we had first to load up with some supplies from Krom Vlei near Elgin. This entailed crossing the Sir Lowrie's pass where the engine boiled. At the Molteno's farm the children played with Bill as if they had never seen a puppy before while I was asked to retrieve some new-born kittens from the thatched roof eaves. We stayed the night there, John Molteno rather doubtfully giving his opinion to his grandmother about the prospect of discovering gold on this trip.

Next day we got away north through Malmesbury over the Gray's Pass where, with the outside temperature of 110F the car again boiled. She had frequent cups of tea. I noted in my diary that evening at Van Rensburg that when she does finally die it will not be from heat which dismayed her not at all. Happily the hotel there did not object to dogs so Bill was made comfortable.

Twenty five miles north of town next morning we visited the Monazite Mine. It was a rough road which led to a solitary rocky kopjie the only place in the world where Monazite is found in quantity, we were told. Mr Small, the Manager, had come down from Oxford in '51 knew a few of M's contemporaries like David Chandler and promised that if I went to ‘The Dog and Duck' near Keble I would get a beer free on his name. (Monazite is I think a mineral containing uranium). We lunched at a dirty siding appropriately called Bitterfontein and went on to tea at Garies, a more picturesque dorp surrounded as it was by pretty Namaqualand kopjies. The following wind caused the car to boil frequently but we arrived at our destination Springbok that evening. I was not impressed with the place and trouble was in store for Bill. There were two hotels the Masonic and the Springbok. The Masonic was managed by a cringing man called Shapiro. I procured milk from the kitchen and gave Bill a couple of dog biscuits. He was so hungry that he tried to swallow the biscuits whole and got one firmly stuck in his throat so that he could not breathe. In our combined struggle to get it out he must have ruptured a blood vessel because when I finally succeeded in getting it down his throat he started that tell-tale wheezing like Fortis after his fall on the mountain. I immediately carried him down stairs and got someone to 'phone a doctor. I told him to bring an injection of haemoclot. When he did arrive he disputed the need for it but I

insisted and he did so. I then had Bill x-rayed, which showed nothing, paid him one pound and took Bill to my room. All night Bill wheezed and his stomach was distended so I feared he might die; but by morning he was breathing naturally. I managed to dissuade Mrs M from leaving and nursed Bill in my room. After lunch I had an argument with Shapiro who said that he did not want dogs in his hotel! So I packed my things and walked across to the Springbok where I was allowed Bill in my room on condition that if he made a mess on the carpet I would pay the damages.

In the afternoon we drove to Steinkop to meet John van Wyck, the coloured foreman Mrs M had used for some years, and prepare for the Richtersveld on the morrow. Steinkop was a pleasant looking place with one Post Office, an Algemene Handelaar shop, a police post and several one-roomed houses. The men wore stetsin hats like cowboys. Back at our respective hotels I found that Bill had messed all over the room but I had luckily folded up the carpet before leaving him. I wrote to Prunella Albers among others relaying Bill's saga.

We set off next morning on the first of ten days exploring in the Richtersveld, the great final bend of the Orange River enclosing desolate hills and cactus trees and grassy flat 'laagte' bottoms. But first we picked up 'the men' that John had collected, de Vries and Tacker the prospector. Both had some Baster hottentot background mixed with a touch of white, maybe a touch of Bushman too. Tacker was in his late 60s with grey hair and had fought in the Boer war as I later learnt, and de Vries perhaps 50. We stopped at the top of Annalies Pass by a spring under a palm tree and stretched out in the distance ahead lay the Richtersveld in shades of ridges. We took a sandy track to a farm called '29' where the owner siphoned 2 gallons out of his jeep as his pump was dry, which gave us a half tank + 4 gallons in tins. We filled all water containers, and the 10-gallon milk churn. The road was now worse than any. I had driven on before even worse than that between Alpha and Omega (the two farms near the Cedarberg) and the passes of which there were several, were steeper. The country had had good rains some days before giving green grass to the veldt but large deep dongas in the road and some mud still soft. The hot wind followed us so we boiled frequently. We went over Kliphoogtes Pass, a gradient of about 1:5 and camped 10 miles further on just 4 miles short of Modderdrift on the Orange. The 10-gallon churn had sprung a leak so we topped the other containers. That evening with the fire, the clear night sky and the first rate company of Takker, John and De Vries was really much appreciated. Mrs M always retired into her tent and was usually contented with just a cup of tea and a biscuit.

In the morning we had to go over Hell's Kloof Pass. This was so steep on the down side that the Dodge felt as if it were starting to slide with the wheels locked. The pass led down to a very dry area with rugged canyons and mountains - terribly inhospitable. The men climbed out of the canvas covered back covered in dust. We made camp in a river bed where there were a few trees. In the afternoon we went off following Mrs M's bidding to take samples from her claim, an abandoned mine shaft. The walk up was hot and the one waterbag shared among us was soon depleted. The rock contained Pyrites which, Tacker knowingly asserted, was a

good sign. In the afternoon I took Bill and followed the tracks of the ‘prospectors' who were exploring the hills north of the camp. Tho' cooler it had tried to rain just a few drops but was still enervatingly hot and when we did catch up with them they had finished the water in the bag. 'Die berge hierond is dood' said Tacker, meaning that the area contained no minerals. It certainly looked dead in other respects with occasional ‘halfmens' cactus trees on the black boulder strewn slopes and a few acacia thorns in the valley bottoms. But as we explored up a long kloof we found spoor of Jackal, Lammergeier nests on inaccessible cliffs and a leopard's lair, Bill was so foot-sore that I carried him the last couple of miles. All indications of rain had gone and that night was a corker with the added torment of mosquitoes. John's arms were covered in spots of blood but between swotting them the men told stories around the fire. Tacker, the oldest was a young man in the Boer war and spent most of his life since prospecting. He worked on water wells in the Kalahari 25 years before for 5 years and had a detailed knowledge of the Richtersveld and the country north of the Orange. He told us a story about a poisonous tok-tokkie' beetle that (for some - reason not recorded) trailed a man's footsteps all around the South West and eventually caught up with him and killed him.

Exhausted with the heat through the night we chose to spend the next day on the Orange River to collect water and cool off. A sand track led down the valley to the tree-lined river. The river had risen with rains and the volume was impressive some 200 yards wide and running midstream at 5 mph. With Bill I walked 3 miles downstream past some rapids where the width reduced to 75 yards and the current increased to 15 mph or so. The water was turbulent and must have been deep for such volume to pass through with little fuss. I was imagining navigating it in the canoe. The mountains either side were barren and big. The Trig Survey map (which I did not then have) shows the Stinkfontein Berge, which we had skirted, dropping in 12 miles from 4039 feet to perhaps 500 at river level. Descriptive names like Mt Terror, Devils Tooth, the Severn Sisters, Dolomite Peak and Rubble Hill are apt while Joffe's Diggings, Prospector's Diggings and Claim Peak tell of earlier interests in the minerals of these hills and one wonders who Joffe was and would like to have heard his story.

I had a lovely swim not venturing far from the bank due to the current and vaguely thinking about The Great Snake, which like the Loch Ness Monster, has been seen in The Great Bend of the river. Of this more when we do the river trip.

We filled the containers and set off to camp towards Kliphoogtes. It rained and brought the sweet smell out of the sand and rocks. The Dodge managed Hell's Kloof in first while the men walked the steepest parts. That night it rained a bit too much so I sought refuge in the cab.

The old Lady sent the men off prospecting next day while I climbed a local hill, Bill managing unaided. While writing letters in the shade of an overhanging rock overlooking camp a donkey cart came in sight so I went down as the old Lady was alone. It was a middle aged weather-beaten trekboer-cum-prospector who said he was looking for some mules of his. In the cart was his wife, a young child, a

couple of blankets, pots and pans. They were not following any road, just 'looking for mules'. I wished them good luck.

Around the fire that night de Vries said that he had served during the was war in the Italian POW camp at Putzonderwater. I asked him if he had ever bumped into Bob Scott there and was not surprised to learn that everyone in the camp knew him as a prize fighter. He talked on for a good half hour about Scottie's style of hitting and feinting, with shadow demonstrations, and his escapades out of the ring also.

Beyond Kliphoogtes we turned off the main Modderfontein track and drove for eight miles into completely different country, the Sandveld. There were herds of wild horses and donkeys and a smell of the sea. Tacker had an idea that tantalite could be found in the vicinity which was fetching one pound a pound at the time. We walked miles along a and mountain ridge across some plateaux and in mid afternoon dropped down into a kloof which happily had some water. I carried Bill much of the return getting back to the old Lady and the car at sunset and sadly reporting 'no Eldorado'. Working on the principle that the Monazite mine was found in association with copper she decided to move next into Bushmanland where there is known to be copper. We camped at a lovely spot by a lone tree. The night was clear, cool, no mosquitoes or ants and a three-quarter moon lit up the mountains in a ghostly light. I felt ignorant about the stars and decided then to start learning their names and celestial navigation.

We reached Steinkop with no petrol to spare having passed through '29' miles and found the pump still empty. Just two hours there to collect mail buy food and Tacker to get drunk then filled cans at Jackalswater and we set off into Bushmanland guided by Tacker in a sinuous line in search of a chap called Edward Cloete that Mrs M desperately wanted to see. We did not find him and camped near a deserted copper mine, the kind of place, surrounded by kopjies and cactus where you might expect to see a covey of cowboys riding out. It was chilly just before sunrise when I awoke to see the men sitting around the fire and Tacker taking off his motor-tyre boots and putting his bare feet into the flames to warm them up. Having cooked the old Lady some breakfast I followed the men's spoor along a sandy 'vlakte' and saw a black snake with a small head about 5' long. De Vries said it was a 'Spuugslang' (spitting cobra?) and John told how he had nearly lost his sight when one spat in both his eyes. We climbed up to a disused copper mine and took some samples getting back at midday. Here, Mrs M had the idea that Cloete might be at Vioolsdrift on the River whence we headed with de Vries as "padweiser' (guide). What a refreshing transformed stretch of river here with orange groves along the flood plain and palm trees. The width was only about 100 yards and in consequence ran swiftly. We found Cloete and I had to interpret her high folluted english and his pidgeon english cum afrikaans, no easy job for them to understand each other. I refreshed myself with a swim coming out caked in mud as the water itself contains 30% sediment and the banks are soft mud. We came across a chap broken down with a leaking radiator whom we could luckily help with some radiator cement and in turn he gave us some lovely grapes from the Olifants River.

Next morning, before leaving the area, we drove back to the abandoned copper mine and hammered in a painted claim stake in Mrs Molteno's name. I forget the area to which this gave her mineral rights excluding diamonds, but I know the outlay at 2 shillings and 6 pence for registering it was not too bad at the price!

We camped in the dark and I played some 'liedjies' on my mouthorgan before going to sleep. In the morning while driving to Springbok Mrs Molteno said to me "I could not get to sleep for a while last night because someone in the road was playing a piano accordion". I asked her if the person was playing it well and she replied "Oh yes, quite well but I do hate the instrument!". I took the hint and decided to keep the mouthorgan more private. When we arrived at the Masonic Hotel a large new notice was erected "NO DOGS ALLOWED". I was not surprised and made Bill reasonably comfortable in the garage.

We spent the weekend of the end of February in Springbok going to O'kiep for Sunday morning service taken by Rev Lavis who reminded me of a neglected pet teddy-bear, perhaps because his wife's devotion was clearly directed to several cats. I was careful not to introduce Bill. A couple of spare hours were given to several letters home to David Liza and James also. The plan was to do an exploratory trip through South West Africa (SWA) visiting what mines we could. De Vries had known of this and was reluctant to come but I managed to talk him into it which was fortunate otherwise all the camp chores would have been mine.

Having labelled and packed a number of rock samples and sent them off to a laboratory in Pretoria we left midday on the 2nd March and drove to the ferry crossing at Goodhouse by evening Here was another splendid example of irrigation on the fertile banks from a weir on the Namaqauland side. The farm run by Van der Heenan grows several thousand orange, peach; banana, mange, lemon and guava trees plus a vineyard of grapes. This last was surprising due to the heat which reached 120F the previous month. The valley here is deeply incised between black mountains. The river was about 150 yards across and running strongly. It had risen 2 feet in the night, so the end of the pontoon was not flush with the bank which needed shovelling The pontoon was a simple effective platform to take a single car or lorry. It was connected to a steel wire by two short ropes to wheels that ran on the wire. By getting an angle to the craft the current propelled the boat across. The current was estimated at 7 mph and we drifted across in 10 minutes, ripples running around the craft. It was built by Carl Weidner whose fame was enhanced by his sense of humour. On one occasion during rough water a car slipped off the end of the pontoon when it was halfway across. The irate owner was furious with Carl Weidner and demanded recompense. Carl unperturbed said to him "Man I'll be generous with you and considering how far you got that will be just the half fare!". At the far bank 2 feet of sand had to be shovelled to close the gap to the steep bank. The back wheels ploughed into it and sank with the Dodge angled up the bank but with the three strong helpers and De Vries we made the gradient.

The first 20 miles towards Warmbad was heavy sand through desolate mountains like driving with the contours of a ploughed field. Then it hardened and became badly corrugated with occasional washed out dongas across the road. The danger

was that driving at above 45 mph to skim the corrugations you were onto these with no braking distance and crashed through more than once with damage to shocks and springs, There was the story heard in the Warmbad hotel “Man, how could I see the donkey? It was lying in one of the corrugations!” We camped near Keetmanshoop. Thunderclouds were building up with showers all around. Another long slow day towards Marienthal under cumulous clouds with the country looking greener from recent rains. That night camping under trees with green grass de Vries told me the story of the ‘Halfmen’ trees - the cacti with two arms and a head looking North. A long time ago there had been a terrible drought and the Bushmen trekked south crossed the Groot Rivier into {for them) forbidden territory in search of ‘kougoed’ a plant which can be chewed to *g*ive moisture. Behind them they heard thunderclaps and turned-in despair-to see it raining in their own country. In this position they were petrified and grew into these trees. That is the legend, but the botanical explanation is no doubt that the flower faces towards the sun which is always northwards just south of the tropic of Capricorn.

Windhoek the capital, was prettily set among hills, about the size of Paarl, with one main street, a residential area below the centre and the government buildings on a hill above and overlooking town. We drove straight through to find a camping spot 5 miles on with trees, birds, long green grass and signs of game. This was strange country to de Vries. He did not want to be left alone next morning while we went into town, so we packed up the camp. First stop was the office of the Mines Commissioner to enquire the laws of the land marked off the prohibited areas of the Sperregebiet and others on maps we had brought with us. The Old Lady did a garrulous round of all the officials talking about irrelevant topics of our trip which they took in good part. At the posh Continental hotel where we lunched, I met Theo Heye from Bishops and he took me after to see Sivertsen also from our class and holder of the 100 yards record. He brought me up-to-date on the sports news while I had the Dodge repaired for its broken shock absorbers.

North of Windhoek on the road to Grootfontein the country became closed in with thick bush, the road sometimes badly washed away. We camped halfway between Sukses and Otjivarango just off the road but surrounded by kameeldoring, jakarandas, teak acacia and mopane trees with tall brown grass of the last season, visibility only 50 yards or so. While de Vries was braaing some steak for supper I had a short walk with Bill putting up a duiker and some Guinea fowl. That night on the radio we heard of Stalin’s death and wondered of the repercussions. Springbok radio turned on some dance music. While ‘You belong to me’ was being played de Vries in sudden high spirits blurted out that he felt like dancing with the Old Lady (who was keeping her own company in her tent as usual). He danced alone in the light of the fire grinning with joy. For supper he produced a good dish of bully and onions with a provito crust. I learned how to bake bread in the sand from him. Having made the dough rise and given it a good flower covering, the fire would be scraped aside and a hole excavated in the hot sand. The dough place straight in the hot sand and covered with coals above. Twenty minutes later it was removed and dusted off no sand adhering to the crust.

We reached Grootfontein next morning and sought out Mr Bristow, manager of the SWA Company whose advice the Old Lady sought on where she could and should prospect. He went out of his way to be helpful. He said we must see his wife whom we found astride a tractor mowing lucerne on their farm. Having showed us around the farm she asked us to lunch and this led to an invitation to stay the night. For supper they dressed in evening dress while I could only sport a lumberjacket and dusty flannels, but I did justice to the several courses served by the waiters. Bristow's strong recommendation was that having come this far we must visit Etosha Pan, stay at the old Fort on the edge of the pan, safe from lions and spend the day watching. I slept in a lovely spare room hoping Bill would not mess on the carpet.

We said our goodbyes after substantial breakfast and reached Tsumeb at 12:00 going straight to the magistrate's office to get a permit. It was a blow to find that NO dogs allowed in the reserve. By stroke of luck I bumped into Mrs de Klerk who suggested I should leave bill on their stoep with their fox terrier. So I took Bill to the Standard Bank where Mr de Klerk was the manager. He bubbled with enthusiasm and immediately ingratiated himself with Bill giving him a meal of biltong and milk. So giving Bill a pat we went to get the car examined at the police station and set off to Etosha.

Eleven miles outside Tsumeb we stopped at Otjikotto Lake the 'pool of death'. It is a water-filled crater about 100 yards across with vertical sides and unfathomable depth (at that time). I never considered it then, but I expect it is a limestone cavern with a collapsed roof but surprising to find the water table so high.

An awful hole in the road which I saw too late broker a rear spring. We limped back to Tsumeb and spent the afternoon at 'Oubaas' garage camping for the night outside.

On the 75 miles in Namatoni, on the edge of Etosha pan, we passed through wonderful original tree bush - marulas, jacarandas, wild-olive, mpanis, amborombongo and lots of others whose names I did not know. We drove up to the Castle built in 1900 as a German hold out against the Ovambos and the Hereroes. The police made clear the rules (designed to protect the animals and not the visitors) and said that three lions had spent the previous night in the camp site which was indicated to us. There was a welcoming carved out pool beside the Fort which was refreshing. We then had the most magnificent game viewing drive along the edge of the pan. I had never seen game in such quantity in the Kruger Park holiday. We drove beside huge herds of wildebeest and zebra stampeding on both sides of the truck. In addition, we saw Jackals, Kudu, Springbok, Ostriches, several small buck, Pauws and several other fowl and birds. The impression was original Africa teeming with life. De Vries and I sat around a huge fire that night listening to distant lions roaring and howls of Jackal nearer. Accommodation arrangements were reversed that night - perhaps on account of the lion stories as Mrs Molteno was in the cab of the truck and we were offered her tent to which mosquitoes soon drove us in to bed. Around midnight, woken by deep-throated

purrs nearby, we sought refuge in the back of the Dodge and passed the rest of the night swotting mosquitoes and listening to this ominous sound

Before breakfast we again drove slowly onto the edge of the pan in search of game. I stopped the Dodge to point out a Steinbok 50 yards off the track when it suddenly darted off startled. In a flash three Cheetah shot past in pursuit, yellow blurred streaks of movement. But a fourth was deliberately trotting at right angles as if to cut off a circle of flight. The kill was out of view.

So ended a short but rewarding excursion. We collected Bill from the de Kochs overfed and well and were again made welcome at the Bristowe's. She loaded us up with eggs and bottles of fresh milk on our departure next morning. In Tsumeb besides supplies we bought some paludrin as a prophylactic against malaria possibly contacted at Namatoni then retraced steps to Otjiwarongo to the Dodge agents to repair broken shock absorbers, but no spares were available, on to Omaruru another 80 miles of bad road. Just before camping out near Omaruru I drove in to a farm entrance to collect some water. The young farmer happened to recognise me as he went to Cape Town university and waiting daily at the bus stop would see me in the car driven by Professor Pollard getting a lift to school. There was no time to reflect on the small world of white southern Africa as it was getting dark for camping. Again the Old lady opted for the cab so I had the luxury of her camp bed and read by candle light 'St Francis of Assisi' and parts of LG Greens 'Lords of the Last Frontier' on his visit to Etosha Pan. I noted with interest that he also related the story of the Halfmens trees told by de Vries. Bill was troubled by large soldier ants.

At Omaruru the local German mechanic made effective repairs to the shock absorbers and fitted an extra blade to each rear spring - all for 8 pounds. We took a terrible road to Karibib to visit the mines there, crossing the dry Omaruru river bed and later the Khan river. The policeman at Omaruru, recently posted from Johannesburg said what a God-Awful place it was, prejudiced as he was against the Germans and lacking the bright lights too. He told us where to find one Berger, a German geologist. His maid recommended that we should call again next morning (Sunday), so we found a decent clean camp spot a few miles out and watched displays of lightning and storms over the Ovango mountains some 15 miles off. Poor de Vries is homesick and only perks up when we have a 'gesels' (chat) about all and sundry after the evening braai.

Burger was at home next morning, but communication was difficult as he spoke little Afrikaans and no English. However, in between admiring his many trophies of hunting in the Kaokoveld - leopard and lion skins on the floor, an elephant's foot as a waste paper basket by the door, a large pair of Kudu antlers on the wall - he did not encourage prospecting around Karibib and advised a visit to Mr Dunn, manager of the Uys tin mine. So back we drove to Omaruru crossing this time the Khan and Omaruru rivers flowing quite strongly after last night's rain in the hills. At this point I should explain that there was not a single bridge as yet built in SWA, the roads led down to a drift crossing which in the case of the main road to Windhoek may have had built a concrete ramp to the river bed. So when the rivers

ran it was necessary to check the depth and current first and as we shall tell the rains this season made driving at times difficult and dangerous.

At the hotel we were told to call back on the morrow to find Mr Dunn, so we drove out and camped. We were just about to eat two partridges that I had shot when the storm broke overhead. We all sheltered in the Dodge while for just 15 minutes the heavens opened. A small river flowed where the fire had been and de Vries's trunk was swept downstream 50 yards and stuck in a bush. We retrieved pots and pans from further down and then as suddenly the sand absorbed the flow and it was just damp. The morning was scented with that clean veld aroma after rain when chongalolos come out and black ants, make up their trails again and the morning sun absorbs the moisture. We were in no hurry so enjoyed a leisurely morning drying out. Dunn was not back from Windhoek so having bought some supplies and filled with water we camped 6 miles out on the Omajette road in a fine spot beside a river-bed. I went off with the gun after two pheasant which eluded me but I came within 50 yards of two lovely Kudu bulls that watched me for a brief moment before gliding off with their horns laid back elegantly.

With plenty of meat, wood and water de Vries and I were content. The Old Lady had been served with her routine thermos of tea brewed with the precise measure of leaves. We slept out contentedly and awoke in the morning to guineafowl clicking and damp with dew.

De Vries was now brave enough to stay in camp alone while the Old Lady and I went into the dorp to do things - some of her clothes to a laundry, a wireless to repair, the Magistrates office for a permit to enter the Okambale Native Reserve where this tin mine is located, a haircut for me and an ice-cream together in a cafe. De Vries welcomed us back with hot juicy chops which went down well with the fresh bread. Back to town to meet Dunn but learnt that he had flown from Windhoek directly to his mine at Uis. Pesch had mended the wireless and agreed to take care of my guns while we were in the reserve. So we left in the morning on the Omajette road which was as reported in a bad state. We came first to Kahero tin mine where two handsome dogs of bull terrier/ridgeback cross bounded into the back of the truck scaring de Vries badly but doing no harm. Mr Francis, the miner, called them off and envied Bill, the first white bull-terrier he had seen in 30 years. Compared to these animals Bill was still very much a pup but he splayed his stance squarely and bravely. We were now in sight of the Brandberg mountains as we drove on seeing flocks of wild ostrich and a herd of some 200 springbok melting across the open sandveldt. By 3.00pm we reached the mine and found Dunn supervising new construction. It was no time to interrupt him then, so we shoved off and camped in a pretty desolate spot with a hot south wind blowing out of the Namib. Perhaps Dunn would show her the mine in the morning,

He had detailed a Mnr Botha, his assistant manager, to show Mrs Molteno around. After a talk on minerals in general he drove us out to a Tantalite claim 10 miles off, this mineral selling at one pound per pound weight. He kindly gave me a small sample. Over a tinned lunch which he kindly provided, he suggested that we should take the Namib desert road to Swakopmund before returning to Omaruru. We would have to take a chance on finding the Omaruru river too high which had

to be crossed at the mouth as they had no means of finding this out by phone or radio. We decided to chance it and filled up with extra 6 cans of petrol plus 10 gallons of water. Just 10 miles out a shock absorber casing broke and while inspecting that I found a leak in a petrol pipe. I bound this with tape but we decided to return to Uis mine where unfurnished accommodation was offered. In the evening Botha spoke of the Brandberg range seldom if ever climbed and rising to 8500 ft. I think Margaret's brother Denys had done some ascents here. I would love to have had an opportunity. Their mechanic fixed up the Dodge problems and also a leaking radiator and with a sketchy diagram of the tracks to take we were away by 10.30 in the morning. We were soon into dunes with flat stretches between, good hard sand so that driving at 30 mph was possible. We saw plenty of game, Springbok and Ostrich and had the delight of one Springbok pacing the car effortlessly for 2 miles. One fork was not marked but we guessed right as we came to the Omaruru river, flowing alright but fordable. We then followed the coast on the best salt road of the trip, hard and flat as a pancake beside the Atlantic - the 'Skeleton Coast'- to Swakopmund, camping just outside the settlement in a desolate place.

The 'salt king' of Swakopmund was a Mnr Klein known also for his interest in semi-precious stones collected in the area, so we visited his office early to be told that he may be back on the morrow, Sunday. To make some use of the day we drove to Rossing 24 miles off which was reputed to be a mineralised area. Rossing was no major town consisting of a short railway siding, a water tank and a signboard! All around was sand desert but a hill feature broke the skyline and there we found an old prospector who had started working a Beryl claim. He gave us a sketch direction to an old Rosequartz mine 4 miles on. It was a kopjie composed entirely of beautiful Rosequartz which we learnt later fetched 10 shillings per kg if you could find the market. With the railhead so close I was surprised at the failure of this mine. Returning towards Swakopmund we camped just 500 yards from the sea which was very cold with the Benguela current. The backwash was not inviting for a swim. With a cold wind we appreciated the fire with the dead wood collected from the beach. Our getaway in the morning was delayed first by the Old Lady taking some time to get ready in her tent and then, having driven just 20 yards we stuck in soft sand. We carried two planks for this contingency, to put just under the two back driving wheels, but every time the car came to the end of the planks it ploughed down into the sand again. After an hour of exertion and with the loan of a bumper-jack from a passing Jeep we got onto the main harder track, Klein was very affable and proud of his collection. It bored me, sad to say, which I regret because had this visit been a year later after taking Prelims in geology, I am sure a great interest would have been kindled. But I saw them only as precious stones of commercial interest which did nothing to me.

We had advised family to write *c/*o Poste Restante so our visit to the PO in the morning was in anticipation of mail but sadly the mail train would not arrive until Tuesday afternoon the next day late. We decided to wait, enjoy the beach and a cold swim, collect driftwood, take a long walk with Bill. It was very cold at night and the Old Lady suffered. I filled two hot-water bottles for her but one of them leaked! There is a daily pattern to the weather here getting warm and calm by

midday, a sea mist developing by tea-time with an onshore cold wind. It never rains and this moisture sustains the few cacti and a fine flowering plant, the Welvitchia Mirabilis. We lazed away the next day and to add to frustration discovered that the train was held up several hours so repaired again to the shore to build up a fire for the night.

We were rewarded next morning, except for de Vries who had nothing from his wife, which would leave him in a sour mood. I had mail from home, David and Liza and from Sir Harry Oppenheimer (Head of de Beers) who was kindly getting approval for us to take a boat through the prohibited area of the lower Orange to Alexander Bay. What date would we arrive there*?* I sent off a cable saying 'Around August'.

We now set off for Usakos 90 miles down the coast to see a jeweller by the name of Brusiers. Past Rossing and the Rosequartz kopjie again through featureless country for another 70 miles seeing nobody. Poor de Vries was in a melancholic state but that evening he made two lovely 'Vetcookies' as a surprise for me he said. This was I believe in return for my present of a bag of tobacco which I had given him to smoke in secret because the Old Lady had forbidden him cigarettes. She said that his coughing at night kept her awake. But this cough was due to the terrible dust in the back of the Dodge. Brusius like Klein enjoyed showing off his private collection but his English was very poor. He also traded in mineral water and we appreciated a sample. No other locale of interest was offered from here so we back tracked to Windhoek collecting the firearms from Pesche's house in Karibib on the way.

We found the same pleasant camp site beside a hill which commanded a good view and had many nooks and crannies for hide and seek with Bill. Liza had sent me a French dictionary in response to a thought that this language I should improve and I had the first mail from Mum and Dad in England on a visit. I wrote to Agape Irving to get my matric results on which Keble College in large part depended. Mnr Boeysen, The Mines Commissioner, was clearly amused at our 3 weeks of sight-seeing and excursions into the mineralised areas. The Old Lady hung on his kindly words and advice. As he explained the diamond prospecting laws her face lit with enthusiasm.

Our next destination was Rehoboth where she had a mind to do some prospecting. We camped in the Bastard Reserve, an area set aside for folk of mixed Hottentot descent called Bastards. Tho' against regulations I shot a guineafowl which we enjoyed for supper in perfect weather, a starry night and a good fire. Rehoboth was a run-down place of half-castes who 'were without exception downright crooks' from where we hoped to hire a trustworthy prospector, and as I later recorded. We camped in a place that lifted the spirits somewhat, outside by a hill which was good for climbing practise. We had a disturbed night as rain came over, the Old Lady sheltered in the cab and we took to her tent. The Magistrate recommended an old prospector and described his dwelling. He recognised none of the samples of Beryl, Tantalite, Shelite, Copper and Fools Gold which we showed him, so I had already dismissed him as a fraud when he blurted out that he knew of a Monazite reef. Gullible Mrs M was beside

herself with interest so we arranged to collect him next day. We bought metal standards and tin for staking claims, supplies and fuel and set up camp again. It was raining now more on than off and then continuously. Vries's bedding got soaked, the degrees of wetness being described initially as 'So nat soos 'n kat" and then “So nat soos 'n nat hoender" (as wet as a wet chicken). In the morning we fiddled with a primus stove in the tent to make tea for Mrs M and some porridge for ourselves. It was slow to boil. Our expression is 'A watched kettle never boils' His was a new one 'Die water sal cook as die dassie stert kry!'. (The water shall boil when the Dassie grows a tail). We reached the prospectors house by 10.00 am. A small girl came out to say that her father had gone away for the day. I went inside to find the wife and elder daughter - no sign of the ‘prospector'. Feeling set-up we complained to the Magistrate, I sensed that his attitude was why would such an old lady want to go prospecting you have to know what you are looking for. His coloured assistant showed us to others, but I suspected that they were dishonest and did not know where the samples they produced came from.

It rained again all night to further dampen our situation and this turned out to be the beginning of a record flood period over the whole of SWA.

The next day was April 1st - April Fools - and fools to be travelling flooded roads. Our plan was to get to Bethanie Graphite mine near Keetmanshoep. The roads were thick mud and water and before Marienthal we stuck in clay but not for long as pushing and digging we progressed slowly. Between Marienthal and Keetmanshoep we were the last car to get through that night. There was a 5 mile stretch of thick mud through which we crawled and slewed at 1 mph. Had we stopped once we would not have started. We passed slowly a family in a new Cadillac stuck up to the doors. We stopped on a slight rise ahead the road being underwater. I walked back to the Cadillac, a Mr Lichtenstein, who said that a team of donkeys had tried and failed to pull the car out and he had been stuck since noon. (I later discovered that this Lichtenstein was one of the two Germans that escaped internment during the war by living rough in the Karasburg Mountains for 18 months. Their story is told in a book that David sent me a couple of years later).

Next morning we continued as the water had drained off the road leaving mud. We came to a river running across which I inspected first by wading across. The flow of water was not too bad but there was a horizontal belt of soft sand underfoot that could not be avoided. I considered that the chances were favourable so covered the spark plugs and removed the fan belt. We stuck with the back wheels deep in the soft stretch, which luckily had a hard bottom, but the back wheels and the exhaust were under water, the current was feeling stronger and Mrs M had to put her feet up on the seat as the river was running though the cab. We struggled for an hour jacking under water and knocking in rocks and planks and then with a concerted heave from Vries and careful use of the throttle, for luckily the engine had not cut, we edged out and up the far bank with relief. Another car came and stuck in the same place and his engine stalled the river running through the doors. A Chevrolet came and got through alright so together with a rope and chain we towed the first car out and then all enjoyed a cup of tea on the far bank. Ten miles beyond Tses we were stopped by a swollen river that

looked dangerous. By 10.00 pm there were 15 cars waiting. An experienced driver took two Fords and a Chev through with several of us pushing behind, the water level rising to the headlights. As we were the only car with supplies we managed to serve a number of the waiting passengers with tea and food.

In the morning the crossing was negotiable and we reached the Hansa Hotel in Keetmanshoep for a good lunch. It was Good Friday. We camped 3 miles out between the road and the railway where I collected some coal for a fire. I reflected that the time I would normally be in a 3-hour service with the family was spent discussing with Mrs M the prospects of finding diamonds along the lower reaches of the Orange River. I told her that the only way she might do so would be to trek with pack donkeys from Modderdrift for 150 miles towards Sendelingsdrift as there were no tracks.

At Keetmanshoep the whereabouts of the graphite mine were explained so we set out along the Luderitz road, which was interesting as it ran through the Vis River valley before climbing through a broken mountain range. We camped 8 miles after Simplon in threatening weather so occupied the tent.

I celebrated Easter morning with a shave and climb up a local hill which left me feeling faint but breakfast restored me and we drove on to Jakkalswater. At the mine we were invited to share accommodation with the Bowen family and a Mr Chapel, whose room I shared. He was from Cornwall and had spent his life prospecting. I appreciated his company very much and his radio news which mentioned the loss of two climbers on Ben Nevis. I stayed up late writing to Mum and Dad and Den for his wedding and recorded a very happy Easter with extremely kind people.

We were given a tour of the graphite mine, Chappel's tin claim and a nearby Beryl mine being worked by three tough looking chaps. I took good samples of these. Another interesting man we called on was a Mr Schneider at Simplon who talked at length about his life of prospecting and mining in SWA until his servant came in to say that his pet baboon had escaped and he left to give chase.

Our SWA agenda was now done after a 4-week reconnaissance and some 2000 miles of driving and de Vries' spirits rose as we discussed the road back to Namaqualand. There was just a visit to make to the Weidners place from Warmbad, the son of Carl Weidner of Goodhouse who had now struck it rich in "Tantalite Valley'. Their house was built of reeds making use of existing shade trees. He and his family were most hospitable and made us feel welcome. After a good breakfast next morning he showed us around the tantalite claim being successfully worked at 4000 pounds a ton. He had plans to lay a railway line into it. As one of the back springs was broken, he kindly offered to take it in to Warmbad after lunch to get it repaired so we jacked the car and removed it. De Vries, Bill and I climbed the mountain behind the house after lunch and took in a marvellous view of 60 miles of the Orange snaking its way through this rugged country. Cecilia his daughter had tea ready and Weidner came back from Warmbad to say that we must spend a second night as the mechanic would bring the repaired spring in the morning. They were interested in the proposed river trip

but I doubted we would look them up as they were a few miles off the river. In fact we did. As we left next morning he gave Mrs M a marvellous collection of minerals with the words "You needn't spend any more time looking for a mine dear Lady 'cause I'm giving you one!". They did not want to see us go, particularly Bill whom Weidner would like to have kept.

As we drove carefully back to Warmbad we heard the news that the Orange was coming down in flood which had reached Onseepkans so we pressed on towards Goodhouse ferry. It was still working tho' the current strong. We had a tea with the Van der Heerers and pressed on to camp in the sandveld towards Jackalswater. We were back in the Richtersveld and the nights were now much colder but de Vries was relieved to be in familiar country.

On Saturday 11th April 1953, Den's marriage to Rachel Youard, which Mum and Dad were back in UK for, we had one more task to do for the Old Lady and that was collect 10 lbs of copper samples from her claim in Bushmanland and estimate the size of the quartz reef - these samples to be sent to Mr Schneider at Simplon, SWA for his assessment. We then drank a cup of tea in the pretty valley with the rugged hills around and drove non-stop to Steinkopf. De Vries was paid off. He had done well and been good company. "Totsiens, Baas", he said as he shouldered his tin trunk, patted Bill and his wife came out of their single-roomed home. "Dankie vir die geselskap en mooiblei", I said, wishing him well and wondering if he could get another casual job. He had been good company and I was sorry to see him go. Mrs M announced plans for the last 5 days - she wanted to peg a uranium claim that John Van Wyck knew about. On Tuesday 14th April we were to drive to Pella (130 miles) to see Weidner's Corundum Saliminite deposit (valued at 16 pounds per ton) to which he proposed to link a railway. Then on the 15th we would drive homewards via the Monazite mine near Van Rensdorp we had visited two months previously.

My diary fails to record these days except the last which was a wet slushy drive along the Olifants River valley. At Goodwood we collected David Needham from home who accompanied us out to the Molteno's farm and helped stow away her gear. To me it was exciting, hearing all the preparations that Dave had made for the Orange trip in my absence and being again in the familiar Cape traffic and on hard roads. The dear Old Lady must have felt excluded as we discussed all that had to be done in just ten days.

Being in her company through the wilderness areas we travelled in the past two months was an experience I was more than fortunate to have and (apart from the disturbance of the piano accordion' one night) and hitting some holes in the road, I think she was pleased with her employee's conduct. I of course wished that I had some geologists training to help her in her prospecting. Now 45 years on I can only write a short sequel to the later years of this remarkable woman, from a letter by Margaret, her grand-daughter. She was 78 at the time of this trip and continued these arduous adventures into her late 80's. She ardently hoped that one of her claims would be a rich strike and yet not be too disappointed if she failed for it was the wilderness deserts that she liked, the sound of Jackals, the sight of Halfmens trees, and just a cup of tea, with maybe a biscuit.

Down the Sinqu through Basutoland

Quite late in the evening of the last day of April 1953 I arrived at the Mont-Aux-Sources hotel having hitched lifts up from Cape Town via Bloemfontein over the previous two days. David had a train concession because his father was connected with the SA railways. I enquired and was told where he was camping. He had lit a fire and bags, rucsacs and kit were in assorted piles. "Ou Bees!" I greeted him, "Whose rucsac is all that clobber going into?". "A few things to slow you down with, Pete" he said, grinning with the pleasure and excitement of my arrival and the accomplishment of so much of the detail planning he and his parents had done to get him here with our supplies for a three-week trek down the Sinqu[1] from its source to Aliwal North, where the canoe was being taken up on the railway, and Biltong left at home meantime, would be driven up by David's parents or sent by rail to meet us there.

We talked around the fire late into the night with the escarpment rising 6000' above for tomorrow's trail and considering the weight of our supplies, about 220lbs between us, decided we would ask in the morning about the price of a pack horse to get the packs up to the police hut on the top. I was familiar with the trail from the trip with James a year before when we climbed The Sentinel. We went through all the kit wondering about last minute things that we might get from the hotel not knowing how many days before we could get supplies of a sort at Mokhotlong. Our equipment was as basic as can be, a small silk tent made of parachute material, sleeping bags and leather lumber jackets, a primus and some bottles of paraffin, a trio of dixie cans, David had a 35mm camera (thankfully for some picture record as a present from his parents) and hand-made draw bags of flour, sugar, porridge, fat, biltong, tea, chocolate and a 121b leg of ham. Dave had a Bergen rucsac designed to get the load high over the shoulders and I had the capacious home-made sack that had nearly been his undoing when he tried it out inside it. We put more wood on the fire, climbed into our bags, talked and laughed and fell asleep in the early hours.

The hotel had a spare horse and its Zulu charge hand, as was normal for tourist residents. Dave paid the two pounds, the first of a few expenses from a very small kitty we had each saved. And what a delight it was to wind up the zig-zag trail without heavy loads admiring the expanding scene as we rose some 6000' feet up the steep escarpment winding around ridges and into gullies where Protea bushes flowered, looking back over bare ridges and wooded valleys that ran into Natal. We had glimpses of the ribbon-like Tugela falls that plunge over the cliffs some 2500' high from its small catchment on the Natal side of the watershed. This part of the escarpment, as its name implies, is the source of not just the Tugela which runs a short 3 miles before vanishing in a thin curtain over the cliff, but also the Singu (the Orange) beginning its 1400 miles route to the Atlantic, the Kubedu and the Caledon rivers which join the Orange within Basutoland, and the Eland river, a

[1] The upper Orange river in this mountain protectorate granted by Queen Victoria at the request of Moshesh the king of the Basuto people in 1849.

tributary of the Vaal which itself is the main tributary of the Orange draining much of the Transvaal and the Free State. Our packs were offloaded in the evening at the foot of a wire winch strung for the purpose of winching gear up a steep final section in a gully where fixed ropes had also been belayed to assist climbers up the last section. Having winched them up we helped each other lift the loads and trudged the last mile to the police hut. It was cold at this height (about 10500') and being late autumn it turned freezing after dark. The concrete floor was not inviting, but to tired muscles after a 14 mile climb, beginning to harden up, we lay back relaxed after a meal of ham and bread. To brew up in the morning we had to break up chunks of ice. We had no gloves and it was pinching on the fingers until the sun broke through some clouds and opened amazing views across the crags of the Sentinel, across verdant Natal towards the Indian ocean only some 70 miles to the east. Our river, which arose a few miles beyond turned away from the near coast in quite the other direction and we would follow it all the way to the Skeleton coast of the Atlantic.

The top of the escarpment here is a close grassy sedge with no trees and no settlements. Only a footpath used by walkers runs along the watershed. Maybe the Basuto bring flocks up in the summer but otherwise it is peaceful and deserted, a great expanse of natural wilderness.

Our first day of heavy trekking started in half-hour shifts but soon reduced to 20 minutes due to the loads, thus covering a mile at a time. The packs seemed heavier and heavier towards the end of each shift, crouched forward at an angle with the straps biting into aching shoulder muscles, counting steps, thinking of the current British Everest expedition and those tiny Sherpa porters who carried loads such as these with apparent ease; there's a rock ahead, but another five minutes to go. Dave will think I am soft if I stop before time. How does all this weight add up? It’s painful but we will get fitter - another 3 minutes to go, there's another rock that'll do. At last the pack is slung down atop the boulder and immensely relieved standing with hands on knees I take a few deep breaths of the cool thinner air as Dave comes up and I can lift his pack down off his shoulders. "Great stuff, Ou Bees, doing fine, let's take five minutes”. Then the exquisite relief of relaxation and near oblivion with appreciation of the beauty of immense surroundings beginning to flood in and that little voice in the mind starting to say “time's up better get on". "OK Dave, ready to go?”' and it would start again. After a couple of hours the 1/500,000 map was of little help and we missed the turn off from the main Mokotlong to Witzieshoek path so trekked x-country a few miles aiming for the Rockeries Pass and the source of the Sinqu. I noted that Dave trekked wonderfully. We camped at 5.00 pm the weather looking uncertain with dark cloud, altitude 9420' and the temperature 40F but it had dropped to 22F in the night. We had done 15 miles. The little tent looked good in the bare frosted landscape.

As we trekked up the Rockeries pass next morning it snowed lightly and we bivouacked in the mist for two hours. We camped at 5.00 pm having traversed the boggy ground that gives rise to the Sinqu, the temperature just on freezing and it was snowing. We had done 12 miles (total 41). I noted that Dave was very tired. Camping in the snow was something of a new experience which we welcomed

having both certain inner eye ideals of Scott's heroic men as told by Cherry Garrard. But of course we were really not equipped well for anything unusual in the way of a cold blizzard which can hit the high Basuto hills so this little touch of snow was lucky.

Monday 4th May 1953
It was marvellous to awake this morning to see no clouds and the ground covered in snow. We ate a good breakfast at the expense of primus fuel and trekked non-stop down the side of the ravine to Mohede, a small kraal on the Sinqu (and perhaps one of the highest settlements at 8600'). We were determined to buy a pony or donkey and so began protracted bartering, time meaning nothing to the Basuto. The afternoon passed and we spent the night in a kaffir hut which was a novel experience.

We had only done 6 miles from the source but coming into contact with Basuto although conversation was limited, the prospect of getting a pony raised our spirits. It was daunting to think that we had now spent 5 days and only covered 47 miles and were due to be at Aliwal North by the 18th in just over 2 weeks with 400 miles or so to go. Dave was carrying some money given by his friend Donald Flegg towards the journey and with this he proposed to buy a horse. I too was carrying precious 25 pounds paid by Mrs Molteno. Throughout Basutoland the Basuto pony was the means of transport. There were no roads for cars except into Maseru the capital and Quitting. Bridle paths linked every village and some of them rocky and like goat tracks but this little pony was equally sure-footed. Here at Mohede we saw our first horsemen sitting bare-back on these ponies with their colourful blankets pinned under the neck like a cloak. The ponies' gait was a triple, trotting with the front and cantering with the hind legs, an easy motion which the horses I had ridden in Transkei also did.

Our expectation of a deal at 8 pounds was not realised. We haggled on but these hill men would not sell. So we trekked on to Lefuyani's kraal reached after two hours and here for a pound we hired a horse and its owner to take the packs on to Mokotlong. We walked steadily from 3.00 pm until after dark "a marvellous walk along the banks of the fantastically winding Sinqu river". At 7.30 pm we came to a kraal in the dark and were offered a comfortable kaffir hut having done 15 miles. We had dropped 2000' from the top the weather was warmer and visibility perfect.

Leaving the kraal early we walked unladen virtually non-stop for 20 miles estimated from the horses' pace of just under 3 mph. It was easy going and delightful. The whole Sinqu valley is broken up by ravines and ridges forcing the river into a perpetual S - bend with the path consequently climbing up over a spur or meandering around a contour. Sometimes the northward sun on our backs sometimes in our faces and often lost in deep ravines as we forded the stream or climbed south facing slopes. As we dropped lower in height there were women working small kaffircorn fields and our guide would greet them as we approached perhaps interrupting their rhythmic singing. Conversations and news would pass in the still air for miles with cries of astonishment or laughter until a ridge intervened. These two young white men walking across their country was

something indeed to talk about and be passed from traveller to traveller and kraal to kraal. “They must be poor bwanas not to have big fine horses like the bwana DC. But do you see how their legs eat the ground?!' The shouts across the valley accentuated the stillness.

We reached Mohotlong in the mid-afternoon. There was a trader's store and a District Commissioner's office. Within a half hour we had inspected and purchased a good pony for 10 pounds. Donald he was called in recognition of his benefactor.

A small airstrip kept Mokhotlong in touch with the outside world for emergencies and post otherwise it was a horse ride over the passes to Natal or down the river to Quitting the way we were going. The DC and his wife Mr and Mrs Nicholls put us up for the night in the official Rest House and were very welcoming

We obtained sacks and rope to make suitable baggage containers for Donald and bought some oats from the store. Leaving Mokhotlong at mid-morning we took the bridle path to Mulomong one of us leading Donald by a halter. It was only 12 miles but easy going and we would have gone further but Mr and Mrs Rousseaux pressed on us to stay and served up lavish meals which vanished with our appetites that were growing with the 80 miles we had walked. Donald was stabled with their own ponies and well fed. We had risen a bit to the bluff on which the store stood. Our altitude was 8000' and the temperature was 32F.

That evening Mr Rousseaux showed us some small gem stones he had picked up in the river gravels. We took a pair of pliers and failed to mark them. “I am not a geologist” David said "But the hardness is certainly more than quartz and you could be onto something good!”. We thought they might be diamonds and now in many years’ retrospect have little doubt as diamonds have been found in upper Lesotho and these high origins as well as those from the Vaal account over millennia of time for the alluvial diamonds washed down to the mouth.

Mrs Rousseaux, with the hospitality and kindness we were to experience right down the river, gave us a leg of mutton, 2 tins of fruit a loaf of home baked bread and a pound of butter "Just to see you down the path” she said. And it certainly did. We covered 30 miles that day, our best yet with Donald clipping along unattended mostly. We camped that night (the 8th May) where the path crossed a tributary in a pretty kloof with poplar trees. There was no moon and checking on Donald later I found that his hobbling had come off. There was nothing we could do but hope he turned up in the morning.

Up early and there was no sign of him. We both looked for two hours and then had breakfast and decided to split up, David climbing up to Balchaza and myself returning along yesterday's track. Happily I found him 3 miles back in a native kraal. After this late start we nevertheless made a good day climbing over a high pass to 9400' and descending 2000 to Mashal then following the river on for several miles until after dark near Masquani. We made 28 miles (now 138 total) and the evening temperature was frosty at 28F with a clear night of stars against the black silhouette of the ridge hills.

With frost on the grass and a cup of tea we left early and walked through the river mist for three hours coming to a trading station run by Mr Crooks and his wife. They gave us a welcome meal and pointed out a shortcut involving crossing the Sinqu at two points Donald was very intelligent at these crossings. To avoid wading across in bare feet one of us would cross and then point him back to the far bank. He would re-cross the river and happily bring over the second man. The stream was now up to 2 deep and some 30 yards across clear water and babbling along in an ever-deepening gorge. We walked all afternoon and came to the foot of the Medikani pass at sunset. We pressed on climbing in the dark amazed at how Donald knew exactly where to place his little hooves between the boulders as we zig-zagged up. At times like this on the trail those liedjies[2] I knew so well would pass the time and miles mimed alternatively in English and Afrikaans

> I think of my darling as the sun goes down, the sun goes down
> I think of my darling as the sun goes down
> Ver weg agter die blaauberg.
> I ride I ride I ride I ride I ride all night
> The moon is bright, the moon is bright
> I'll be there in the morning.

I thought of the Boer commando under Jan Smuts who rode through Basutoland in the winter to avoid detection and try to relieve the commandos in the Cape[3]. So ragged were their clothes and unprepared for the snow and cold that they dressed in potato sacks with a hole for the head and two for the arms. How well fed and clothed were we by comparison. Only my feet were giving some discomfort as I noted in the diary with these 30-mile marches as we did again this day. I wore veldskoen obtained in Springbok with car-tyre soles but the toes cramped slightly. The Basuto walking back from his stint on the mines would carry his new-found possessions and his smart shoes over his shoulder. Would that my feet were equally tough.

We got over the pass to the Medikani river camping two hours after dark. It was frosty again at 25F. Some wood was beginning to be available in these kloofs which was welcome for fires, our first on this trip.

A late start after yesterday's exertion. We passed the Medikani store where Mr de Kock served up a welcome cup of tea from the rondavel he lived in and then came to a suspension bridge over the Tsoelike River. Could we get Donald over? He trusted us now and it was not too shaky. With one in front and the other behind encouraging he crossed, but alas no photograph. Shifley somehow crossed suspension bridges of lianas with his two ponies in the Andes and would have thought nothing of this. At Tsoelike Mr and Mrs Buss hospitably entertained us and as if in answer to a prayer from my feet we were offered a hot bath and a bed.

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[2] Afrikaan folk songs

[3] described in the book *Commando* by Denys Reitz

Outside 'progress' was now encroaching into the hills after 200 miles on paths only, there was now a road and Buss had a vehicle. We took it in turns one walking or riding if Donald was not carrying both packs, the other benefitting from a lift offered. So I reached Sekakes in a van and pitched camp waiting for Dave who rode Donald and arrived after dark.

Keeping to the river gorge we left the motorable road and took tracks that followed the shoulder of the most impressive Sifarong Gorge dropping at one point 1560' in steep buttressed sides to a river which was now growing in volume. This site was already earmarked for its dam potential. By sunset the path had wound down to the water's edge where we camped in a grove of trees. We had lost nearly half our height from the source in the first 240 miles with well over 1300 miles still to go. The river could be navigable in parts in these reaches but for the problem of getting canoes up here.

It was Ascension Day the 14th May good reason for rising early which we did and getting off soon after dawn and all went well to the Qade river crossing at lunch stop but then the quarter inch map we had misled us as the Kubong store was incorrectly shown so we lost a couple of hours. I think the bush telegraph had preceded us somehow because the Cuzens were expecting us and made us very much at home with a hot bath, supper and spare room in their modest home. All their supplies were brought in by donkeys and no car had yet been seen here. Another 20 miles this day, total 258.

We were set up with a huge breakfast and Donald had been fed special hay. They waved as we set off at a good trot shouting our thanks to these warm-hearted isolated traders. We kept up a good 4mph most of the day, reached Maklakwena's store after midday and were given a snack by Mrs Koning, crossed the Quitting river in the late afternoon and walked through wonderful country until sunset going on in the dusk to Mount Moorara where kind Mnr Burmeister gave us beer, a meal and regaled us with stories. Another 25 miles.

When all is going smoothly without a care in the world how quickly can follow a worrying situation. We were on a minor road again and I was riding Donald to Quitting while Dave was accompanying Mnr Burmeister with the baggage in his car. Mnr Burmeister had lent me a saddle for the ride. I took tracks that followed the Orange and was probably whistling 'Down on the range' or 'Oh what a beautiful morning' as it was warm and sunny when I reached Fort Hartley and had occasion to go into the store and buy something. My lumberjacket was not there!. It contained my passport and 25 pounds in cash, all I had for the trip. I had had it when I started. I galloped back on the trail thinking the worst that some traveller would have picked it up. Never before had either of us pushed Donald beyond a triple but he went beautifully, perhaps sensing my urgency. With a flood of relief I found it at a roadside camp where I had stopped for a cup of tea. Relieved, I regained my equanimity and late that day after 30 miles we met up with David near Quitting.

We had trekked 330 miles from Mont-Aux Sources to this point near the border of Basutoland. It was 80 miles by road to Aliwal North and we were behind schedule

so we discussed with Mnr Burmeister and did a deal parting with dear Donald for ten guineas not knowing who could take care of him if we took him out of the Protectorate and shouldered our lighter packs again down the road. What a blessed pony he was and how greatly he had facilitated the walk! After 5 miles we got a lift to Aliwal North. The contact there was the vicar and his wife Rev Bacon, thanks to Dad. It was Sunday. In the church at evensong we saw David's parents and we gathered afterwards at the rectory for a welcome meal, news greetings and letters from Mum Dad, JM and Liza. The canoe had arrived undamaged by rail. Biltong was being sent up also by rail expected on Wednesday. Two days passed unrecorded but on the 20th May Dave and I were able to borrow his father's car and explore back up the river we had driven past on the Sunday examining it at a few points accessible by road. Meantime the canoe was un-crated looking shiny painted new for the last time and the loading of boxes of stores, guns, bags and trolley wheels sorted out. We were taking a fair amount of supplies and reckoned the boat plus gear weighed 800 lbs. The idea of the 2-wheel trolley was to help portage around waterfalls and bad rapids. It sat across the boughs one wheel over each side. Bill would arrive in the morning by train and the boat trip would start.

Reading again a letter I wrote from Aliwal North to my father I see that adolescent humour at our hosts expense was casually passed on to him "..... The Bacons have been very good to us and everything is in order. Mr 'Streaky' Bacon has an Anglican community of 500 in an area of some 5,000 square miles with the result that he is not likely to suffer from overwork. At any rate he has certainly saved our bacon!" I also acknowledged certain books he had sent up with the Needhams as it was evident that he was more concerned than I regarding preparation for Oxford. “I will start reading now "The Geology of South Africa' but I don't think there will be much time for any other geography books although I would like to get stuck into them”. As my skimpy diary shows there was scarcely time to write a few lines let alone study text books but occasional references to rock types and how they influenced the character of the river are thanks to this one and my father's foresight.

On the River through the Karoo

The little party that waved us off as we paddled shakily out to midstream, myself in the rear, David for'ard and Biltong padding about uncertainly amidships on top of the splashcover over the stores, were David's parents holding hands and waving, the vicar and his wife, the town magistrate and a newspaper reporter. We paddled with mixed feelings hiding as best we could, from their awareness and our own, the fact that this was the first time we had launched the canoe anywhere and neither of us had any experience of canoeing rivers, let alone one generally regarded as un-navigable for practicable purposes. Wilcox[4] writes in his first chapter on the formation of the river 'And because of its steep gradients, cataracts and waterfalls it is perhaps the least navigable of all rivers of comparable length, on which, I think uniquely, no water craft other than floating logs were used before the coming of the Europeans'. True, I had read the experience of a trapper canoeing down the Peace River in Canada and taken a canoe on the Cherwell at Oxford, but practical experience was limited and David's probably less so. While this did not concern us too much it must have concerned David's parents considerably as they waved us out of sight around the first bend. I do not think either of us gave much consideration to the feelings of apprehension we must have caused our parents at this time. We both owed more to them in their loving unselfish support than can be counted because never was there any suggestion that we were taking on something they would have preferred us not to. Yet it must have been so. There was much to learn as we progressed and the best teacher of all would be the river itself.

The Friend Correspondent got a straight little piece in his newspaper the following Tuesday headed DOWN ORANGE RIVER IN A CANOE and mentioning that a small group of well wishers gathered at Voortrekkers Drift to bid them bon voyage. The Reverend E.A. Bacon (Streaky' as we irreverently called him) wrote a two-page letter to my father on our departure which has survived along with other cuttings and correspondence. Besides a general account of our stay and activities he said that this launching point besides being a ford used by the Voortrekkers was mentioned by Archdeacon Merriman as a spot where he enjoyed a swim returning from an official visit to Bloemfontein in 1850 (his book is 'Passages of Missionary Life' pages 94-95). He reassured my father with the words "*…the canoe was perfectly balanced. The stowing of the baggage could not have been better arranged. She rode the river beautifully. Within a minute the Ittle craft was out in the stream. I had a nostalgic memory of Hammersmith bridge and the Boat race. Then, unknown to the boys, the Needhams and ourselves drove a few miles down the river, parked by the roadside, walked about a mile and a half over the veldt, and waited to see the canoe come down. We were able to watch the approach from a distance through various channels. It was obvious to me that the boys knew well how to manage their craft."* Kind reassuring words that belied our inner feelings of incompetence but nice to know that we had given that impression. As a thoughtful postcript he added in ink 'PS Biltong arrived safely and in good spirits

[4] A.R Wilcox 'Great River' (The story of the Orange River) published **1986 p.8**

on Thursday morning. He seems to enjoy the canoe. Our cats made themselves scarce, so we were able to enjoy a little of Biltong's rather charming company before he sailed."

Our first lesson was the danger of quick-sand where I stepped on a sand bank and sank over the knees trapped for a minute but not irretrievably like some sheep and goats that owed us their lives for extricating them from the banks in the days following.

It was a day of perfect weather. To us both it was fun and diverting to have Biltong along with us again, met only that morning off the train, learning the command BOAT! to mean get amidships and lie on top of the Pyotts biscuit tin or the cover over the bags just aft of the trolley axle. We hit a rock that knocked him into the river, startled but quickly retrieved and as his smile told us, glad to find that instinct had taught him dog-paddle. We fixed a line from the boat to his harness for further security. In the calm stretches he lay watching bubbles. In the fast rapids he sat up watching waves and rocks pass with interest. It became as much his journey as ours. Like Mrs Chippy of Shackleton's Endurance expedition, he appeared to supervise every manoeuvre and was impartial with his affection, ensuring always that come what may we would stay a happy trio.

I was pleased to note that there were Egyptian geese and varieties of duck to supplement food. We pulled in for our first night as the sun went down casting long shadows across rocks and banks with a rapid hissing ahead. The flood banks offered silty platforms and always stacks of dry drift wood for a fire. Camping was the simplest situation except for crossing the few yards of soft mud from the tied-up boat to the chosen patch of bank where the two boxes and our personal bags and guns were put down. We had done an estimated 12 miles that first day, hit a few rocks and steered clear of many more. The river was growing still in size. The boat needed to be stabilised more with tubes, we discussed that evening by the fire, as we drank coffee and listened to noises of night creatures and the water running. Beyond the circle of firelight all was lost to sight and mysterious. Bill's ears twitched and he growled, until deciding that all was well he circled and lay down in the crook of my legs warmed by the fire.

Friday 22nd May 1953

There was a thick mist on the water for quite a time after sunrise that delayed us a bit and we saw a lot of small game coming down. Having negotiated the rocky part in front we had no trouble for 12 miles the river becoming deeper and more sluggish. This was explained by a weir at Goedemoed. We spent the afternoon negotiating this and ended up taking the canoe down a narrow canal alongside the unnavigable stretch below the weir. The canal terminated in a water mill and the banks were so steep we had to leave our attempt to get the boat back into the river until the morning. We carried our kit to the bank and passed a wonderfully comfy night with a huge log fire. It freezes at night. We are realising now what the difficulties will be but so far things are encouraging. Bill in excellent spirits not too much nuisance. 15 miles total 27 (from Aliwal N.)

Again there was a thick morning mist as the warmer water mixed with the cold air. Dave and I found two farm labourers to help us lift the canoe out of the canal and carry it to the river. By this time it was mid morning and several dolerite sills across the river naturally dammed the river and caused little rapids or small waterfalls some of which we could walk through. Towards evening we came to a rapid where it was decided after a recce from the rocks we could climb out onto that Dave would take a line from the rock and I would steer it through. This worked well the only advantage being that it lightened the bough as she dived down the few feet and glided into the pool below. We camped just beyond.

The evenings spent are simply glorious. Camping with a huge log fire and a half moon lighting up the river with the sound of the rapid and the water lapping on the crag is to me an almost perfect situation. The weather is ideal tho' progress slow at the moment. 8 miles total 35

Better progress was made next day as there was no morning mist to delay a getaway. Several rocky reefs were negotiated, some we led the canoe over on lines others we shot because they were too powerful. We touched rock three times but did little damage. I managed to bag a duck with the 12-bore which we had for supper baked in clay in the coals. 20 miles total 55. Next morning, 25th May, we shot three rapids in the morning then had a long stretch of placid river and came to the junction of the Caledon river giving us additional water all the way from Mont Aux Sources and draining much of western Basutoland[5]. We reached the Bethulie bridges midday and having decided that it would be worth fitting rowlocks for Dave to row in the quieter stretches, he went off to the dorp to find a Smithy returning at 5.00pm with the news that they would be made by the morning[6]. Fitting rowlocks and oars took the next day so we made no progress but camped again in a pleasant place under trees and ate meals at the Gudmanz farm nearby. We set off on the 27th May Dave rowing and myself paddling at the

[5] the view across to where Bethulie stands from the South bank and also the view of the Caledon / Orange confluence are pictures by Johannes Schumacher, artist to Colonel R.J. Gordon (1777) and now in the Gordon Collection in the Rijks Museum, Amsterdam - source A.R. Wilcox 'Great River' 1986.

[6] In February 1836 just 120 years earlier Potgieter's party of the Great Trek crossed their wagons near this location. The river was higher and they cut willows and lashed bundles to the waggons to aid flotation. They were trekking **away fro**m british oppresion in the Cape and on the other side was a free country. It is recorded that each group of women as they crossed sang this verse:

Komt, treen wy dan gemoudigd voort,	Come let us forth with courage tread
In vast vertrouwen p zijn woord;	and to His word hold steadfastly,
hoe moelik ons de weg ook schijn	How hard may seem the road ahead
en eind zal zeker zalig zijn.	The end will surely joyful be.

I owe this to A.R. Wilcox "The Great River' 1986 **and will have other occasions** to quote from his researches.

rear. After 5 miles we were hailed from the bank by someone who turned out to be a reporter for ‘The Friend'. There must have been a news item of our departure from Aliwal North and this was the beginning of series of ‘find the canoe boys' by reporters at road crossings. We were always anxious to avoid them as we did not wish publicity and worse exaggerated reporting or alarm forecasts of our situation in the river ahead. We went through three rapids and recorded our best progress yet - 25 miles. From our camp we listened to the ominous low roar of a rapid ahead.

The banks were frozen and it was “rather uncomfortable walking the craft through a long stretch of shallow rapid first thing in the morning. Soon your legs lost most sensation as you braced them in the current holding the boat your feet feeling for the gaps between boulders and as much of your weight as possible supported by the gunwale on your elbows. When it was clear that the depth was sufficient and the forward stretch of rapid sufficiently open to avoid collisions, we would jump reaching for the paddles and getting steerage way over the water as rapidly as possible. Several times this day we scraped badly on rocks. Over an hour was spent carrying the kit and the boat around a six foot fall with a huge throwback wave below it. 14 miles and another rapid to give background noise and speculation as we camped in a nice spot and I noted *we are both now very fit.*

Next day 29th May, we paddled through a tranquil stretch where the wind had raised waves causing the recognition of rocks to be difficult. Then shot three rapids and entered a deep gorge with mountains either side and a number of leguaana dashed down and dived into the water. Baboons sported on the krantses. I shot a fat goose. This location, about two miles from Norwals Pont bridge, is likely to be where the Hendrik Verwoerd dam was later built flooding a huge area upstream as far as the junction of the Caledon above Bethulie and increasing the width of the lake thus formed to about 25 miles at one point.

We had an introduction to the Edmeades farm at Norwals Pont but found them away. However, Mr and Mrs Weir put us up very comfortably in a rondavel. It had been quite a strenuous month and we were in no hurry to get away next day what with the soft beds which Bill thoroughly approved and the lavished hospitality and loquacious company of the Weirs. He was an unexpected find in a quiet karoo sheep farm and talked with an Oxford accent as if it was some kind of banishment from where he really should be - the Home counties. We enjoyed this lazy day with a ride first thing on their two sqewbald horses made short by finding a sick lamb that we brought back on the saddle. Then a press reporter came and took photos and details for the Cape papers, which we found a bit alarming but requested no embellishments. A second day was spent being taken down by a neighbour, Mr Halmsworth, to a spot 15 miles downstream where the whole river, at this state of water, converged into a narrow channel just 25 feet wide having passed over a waterfall some six feet high. We estimated the depth at least sixty feet for the volume of water to pass. The rock was a black oxidised igneous basalt. We saw a large leguaan, two buck, two hares and a flock of guinea-fowl. Back in time to give the canoe its first repair sealing with heated bitumen plastic along the sides of the under runners and another enjoyable evening in the Weirs good company and

their performing dog which on the command DRIVE would stand up on its hind legs, bark and front paws start steering. Bill looked on with his head on one side.

1st June 1956. The Weirs supplied us with some food for the river and Halmsworth insisted on accompanying us the first five miles in his metal boat so we set off together. We were the faster craft but he caught up in the shallows as he could scrape through with impunity. Towards dusk we shot a low waterfall and were quite lucky to come through. We slept just a hundred yards from the larger waterfall we had looked at yesterday. 15 miles. Total 130.

2nd June 1956 Coronation Day
And Everest climbed tho' the news of that we did not hear then. We got the boat and kit around the waterfall and launched in the deep narrow gorge swirls of dark water boiling up from the deep below and black water-smoothed rocks rising each side to several feet above. In a flood the river gets above this level and the flood bed is wider but this lower water channel was a bit eerie in case we should come to a point where we could not climb out should we need to. The national road bridge (CT-Colesburg-Jo'burg) which I had driven in a carefree way across with the Duncans last, was reached midday to the surprise of some tourist picnicking there. Then the afternoon section of another ten miles started the succession of rapids we called “The Colesberg Kloofs'. Narrow gorges and rapids were followed in quick succession and most of them we shot because the option of stopping and portaging was off-putting also. The last of the evening practically swamped the boat but she rose up proudly. My days diary ends *Hope the river improves and Long Live the Queen. Dist 20 miles todate 150.*

Wed. 3rd June 1956.
Today has been our worst as far as rapids are concerned and I think our luckiest as far as negotiating them. We wheeled the canoe around an 8 ft drop in the morning and led her through a lesser one on a line. We shot six others. One nearly swamped us and my compartment came out half full of water. At dusk we took a rather foolish chance and canoed straight ahead at a rapid thinking it would be fine. In the last twenty yards we saw a sheer drop of a few feet ahead onto a rock and in the nick of time swung her clear and got through with a bad bang on a rock and quite a fright. We are again sleeping between two rapids but it is a lovely spot with plenty of wood and both very happy. Supper consists of fried mutton, 1 slice bread, 1 vet-cookie and a brew. We have been travelling though deep mountain gorges all day and part of yesterday. Today must have seen 23 buck, lots of monkeys and dassies. Bill is very well and very spoilt. I hope all goes as well in the future as it has done so far. 15 miles total 165.

The next day was a repetition of the same but it was raining. The kloofs continued and we shot 5 or 6 rapids 3 of them big ones. The map indicated that we should get out of the kloofs tomorrow if nothing went wrong. But that was wishful thinking. We did 20 miles, total 185.

Friday 5th June
We made good progress through to mid afternoon shooting a couple of pleasant rapids. We had at Bethulie fixed a buoyancy tube to each side of the canoe, simple

car tubes tied into an elongated figure of eight, tied fore and aft and connected together under the boat. These were tremendous lateral stabilisers and enabled one to stand up in the back of the boat approaching a rapid and get a better elevated view of the prospect of waves and rocks beyond the smooth V-shaped tongue of water that drew the boat in. Decision was necessary without delay whether to get clear of the flood stream, beach the canoe and inspect, or decide on a line through it and paddle like mad to keep it. By this time we had become quite experienced in handling her and were always less inclined to spend time portaging as we became more confidant tho' we knew that time and again it was with an element of luck that we got through.

We came to a longish rapid in the late afternoon and decided to find out where we were before running it. We walked inland 2 miles and found a farmhouse. The farmer was away but we spoke to his labourers. “Die Baas en mevrou is in die dorp, myneer”. We discovered that was Petrusville and how many miles away. Getting back to the river just an hour before sunset and inspecting the rapid we decided it was safe enough if navigated down a chosen route. So it would have been, the water was running fast, about 15 mph and a passing rock knocked the cradle nearly off the boat. I caught it with one hand giving up my attention to steering and David had to help me momentarily too. This diversion in the middle of the rapid proved fatal as having pulled in the cradle there was no time to avoid a half submerged rock directly in the path. We rode straight up the middle of it, slewed broadside and tipped sideways upstream, the force of the water going straight in top of the boat. I was knocked off my perch and struggled in the water to clear my shorts that were hooked over the metal bar at the stern end that projected a couple of inches proud as an attachment for a stern line. Meantime Bill was under the boat held by his line attached to his harness and Dave did a superb job pulling him out. Having extricated my pants and taken in the situation with the south bank 20 yards away across a powerful stream my first thought was to get Bill to this bank. "Give him to me Dave, we'll get him out of this first!”. Unclipping him and held in one arm the current took me down but my feet got some purchase on the boulders on the bed that was not more than four feet deep and Bill's 60 pounds gave me better weight and I reached the bank some 30 yards downstream. I released Bill and waded in a bit to catch the line that Dave now threw across. I couldn't find a suitable rock belay so held a standing belay while Dave crossed over. Then we made a good belay on a rock. No pulling would budge her. We both crossed back to the canoe to see what we could salvage. The pressure of water was tremendous. All I could get out was one of the guns, the .22 which I buckled through the line and pulled behind me. We were wearing our lumberjackets fortunately as it was already getting cold and dark, but apart from torn shorts nothing else, and we certainly wished we had gym shoes on as we hobbled barefoot towards the farm. In the karoo grows a little bush whose seed is a 4-pronged thorn so that whichever way it lies one spike is upwards. Appropriately called 'Duivel doring' (devil thorn) it is a very effective solution by Nature to ensure spread of the seed in tender feet tho' I cannot recall that we were so philosophical particularly as Bill decided this was just the right time to chase a flock of sheep - after all that patient sitting in the boat and a cold swim how could he be reprimanded? But with frequent pauses bent over, one foot raised, we were both

consoled and cheerful in the circumstances. "Ya, we were lucky to be quite close to a bank" - "Thank God you pulled Bill out, Dave and the line held" - "here he comes with a grin all over his face and his tail wagging" - "Now keep to heel, and don't look at sheep!" - With a bit of luck she (the boat) will last the night" - After an hour we were glad to see a group of the farm workers around a fire with a welcome mug of coffee and some floor space where straw was spread to doss down. *We didn't manage to get all the thorns out of our feet but we slept reasonably well. 12 miles total 197.* My diary concluded. We were about a sixth of the way down the river.

These splendid rapids through the 'Colesberg Kloofs' are now of historic interest since the building of the P.K Le Roux dam. Along here the bed of the river is being buried in silt and no longer is there a rush of cataract, a chatter of moving boulders, hissing and splashing of enlivened water. All the river's erosional land forms, potholes, arches, weirs of dolerite and cut channels and all those magnificent willow trees and exposed silty flood banks, no more, until some future time the Gariep (the Bushman name) will break through these man-made barriers in one gigantic release of many years of stored energy and rush tumultuously all the way down taking everything with it.

The foreman assumed his Baas' permission and after an early cup of coffee in the morning he got together a span of 'boys' and some ropes and we went down to the river in a lorry. With relief the canoe was still there lying further down in the water wedged against the rock. 'It was slightly unpleasant battling out to the boat in the cold water on an empty stomach and disappointing to find that the 'flea bags' had gone but it was a relief to us both that the canoe was still there. It was very difficult to work out there in the current up to my stomach forcing the legs and feet off the bottom. I managed to twist a wire ring around the flat iron in the centre of the canoe and tied the rope through that. Dave then crossed over on the rope with a wire line and tied that onto the prow bracket. We then clipped David's rucsac onto the wire with a karabiner - containing camera, PO book, 15 pounds, first aid etc and the men on the bank pulled it safely to shore. It was no use trying the same way to get my pack out. We crossed on the big rope and we then tried to pull her off. We tried three times. Each time the rope broke and each time one of us went back to tie it.

We then abandoned the rescue attempt temporarily and got a lift into Petrusville. In the dorp we found Mnr Van Veeren the farmer who turned out to be extremely helpful. It was arranged that his brother would go out in the Jeep and try to pull it out. Dave and I bought a pair of 'tackies' (gym shoes), cheap trousers, and a badly needed lunch at the hotel. At the farm some wire was collected and back at the river we both waded out again to fasten it. Three times the jeep took up the strain and twice the wire broke with a clang but third time lucky she pulled clear in one piece and half submerged was dragged ashore and up the bank. In typical Afrikaaner hospitality Danie Van Veeren gave us free use of the house as his business in town was not finished. We surveyed the losses. The bottom amidships had been torn out by the current but in a week could be repaired we thought. We

had lost estimated 50 pounds worth of kit - the cradle (12), our bags (20), boots (4), 'tackies' and my clothes bag (5).

Nine days passed with these hospitable Boers while we worked on the canoe with the assistance of a coloured carpenter who did a first class job of renewing the broken frame. A reporter visited and took a photo of the repair work. As mentioned, my mother kept a folder of letters and paper articles of this and later adventures. Included in this is a letter to my father from this farm - Lemoenfontein, addressed to Dad alone because my mother was in England for two months.

Lemoenfontein
Sunday 14th June 1953
Dear Dad,
We have eventually finished the canoe and I think it is probably in better condition than when we started. Thank you very much for ringing up. It was good to hear you all over the phone and the exchange were generous with the 3 minutes. It is jolly good of JM to send up his fleabag. I have just remembered that there is that red one we bought in a sale. I hope that one is sent up instead because JM's is such a good one. If JM's is sent then please send the other to Prieska and I will send back JM's. I lost some valuable clothes and those nice car-tyre boots but those things are easily replaced. We have enough clothes and 'tackies' are sufficing for footwear. It is a pity about the cradle which was so perfectly made but by cunning arrangement of a nylon line at each end we can lead the canoe through bad places and a sheer drop of a few feet never involves much carrying. From Aliwal we have only taken the canoe out four times in spite of what the papers reported, so I think we will manage. You can be sure that we will leave tomorrow well supplied with meat, bread, fruit etc. Mev v.d. Veeren is expecting a baby next week yet she never stops once from working in the kitchen and doing housework etc. Yesterday David was roped in to play rugger for Petrusville vs Petrusberg as they were shirt of a Wing. Luckily they had their quota of forwards. They played on gravel with a rocky reef running across the centre. Last week a man was killed on that field and yesterday a chap broke his arm. We estimated that the whole team must be worth close on a million pounds as the 'skaapboer' (sheepfarmer) around here pays up to 10,000 pounds income tax a year and a medium sized farm of 5,000 morgen is now worth 50,000 pounds. After the rugger we went with the V. Veerens to his brothers farm where we were roped in to a 'tickydraai' (accordion songs and dance) which went on warming up to a climax at around midnight and then wound down to a plate of soup at 01.30 to sober the Boers up enough to drive their new Packards home to their respective farms. The two Englishmen were the only ones with the exception of Mev v.d. Veeren who weren't tight. I only refused the double brandies offered when I discovered I had secretly filled a large trophy cup on a mantlepiece with neat brandy. We expect to launch away again tomorrow and may get to Orange River (the station) by Thursday. I hope everyone is well in the Deanery

vicinity and please give love to Ruth[7]
Lots of love - Peter

These Boers were as physically strong as they were hospitable and kind - to travellers of a race of their own deemed equality at any rate. Gerrit Van Veeren boasted that he could hold the weight of a jeep off one wheel while the wheel was changed. David survived the rugby and news of our re-start on the voyage went downstream with advanced promises of help.

He wore a stalkers cap and an old tweed jacket as he waved us off at Havenga bridge. “Alles van die beste seuns and kyk dardie witwater mooi nou” (All the best and watch those rapids well).

That day, 16th June, is missing from the diary but we made about 21 miles to the farm of the Bloemendahls where it was arranged we should stay. From here it was 11 to Orange River Bridge where we expected to find mail. The river lost none of its karoo character with narrow deep channels and rapids. At 3.00 pm we were held up by 'extremely bad rapids going through narrow shutes of 20 to 25 feet wide'. We left the boat and walked fast for an hour and a half to get the post before it closed - letters from the families and Liza. In the dorp a Mnr Naude took us back to his farm promising help around the rapids in the morning.

Good as his word he took three labourers and we found the boat where we had drawn it up and four men carried it some 440 yards around to placid water. More shutes were ahead that day and one paddle was broken. We reached the railway bridge mid afternoon and the station master turned his skilled hand to repairing the broken paddle! The canoe was already leaking badly again so we turned her over on camping heated up some bitumen and spread it along the keels. What comfort JM's bag was, collected at the PO yesterday. 15 miles and to-date 248 (from Aliwal).

What a handyman that Station Master - not content with repairing the broken paddle he had been up and made two new paddles which he proudly brought to us in the morning as we stirred the porridge. The river dwellers were each and everyone keen to do their bit. Never before had they seen a boat come down. It was an adventure to be part of.

Here we had bypassed Hopetown and expected to get easy river through to Douglas where the Vaal joined. But for three days we negotiated confined kloofs, narrow naturally dammed river and sudden waterfalls. On the 20th we had a 12 ft high waterfall where luckily we caught a backwater and banked before going over and portaged around. Also we passed through the narrowest channel of ten feet only between confined black rock sides. Later the river would widen to three miles or so in confused islands but here, touching a paddle on either side must have been metres deep and it boiled in upwellings. Eight minor rapids were shot some

[7] Ruth was the much loved and buxom coloured servant who had been with us the previous 10 years.

swamping the canoe with overspill. We did 12 miles that day. On Sunday 21st I awoke late at 08:00 and Dave had already made breakfast.

The rocky gorge that the river runs through seems endless. All day it was a case of paddling along a dammed-up pool with a rapid at the end of it. We 'lined' about 5 and shot 6 today. After lunch we walked two miles to an old farm house but no-one was at home. However we discovered our whereabouts - half way from Hopetoun to Douglas. Camping with a huge log fire 50 yards from a 3ft waterfall. 15 miles to-date 295. Better progress was made next day covering 20 miles with 6 rapids in the morning and clearing the kloofs at midday the gradient became more constant and we enjoyed straight flowing water. For supper I made bread in the ashes, we relaxed and put a dead tree on fire to burn all night. 20 miles total 315.

In the morning the innocent looking grey ash of the fire caught David by surprise. He walked across it and burnt his toes badly. Bill looked sympathetically as he had done the same thing and learnt a lesson. He was in pain rowing on to Douglas bridge which we reached at 11:00 after an easy stretch of river. We met Mnr Van Der Merwe expecting us and had arranged everything for us. He took us into the dorp where we were treated to lunch at the hotel and then out to the Symond's farm where we were to be their guests. Their irrigation scheme was impressive. He owned three Dalmatians which played with Bill. She, determined that we should not run short on tobacco gave us 200 cigarettes besides 50 eggs as we got away on the morning of the 24th. It was 12 miles to the confluence of the Vaal where the river telegraph had alerted Mr and Mrs Sapper to expect us. We shot through three rapids and reached the junction after dark. The canoe was now leaking badly again. As we were so kindly received by the Sappers and their son, James, of our own age, we arranged a stopover to waterproof the canoe and enjoy their hospitality.

James Sapper took the mule cart down to fetch up the canoe in the morning which we worked on with bostik glue and bitumen. He then took us to see some very interesting Bushmen paintings. We again worked on the boat after supper, enjoyed their company and after saying 'goodnight' wrote several letters until 2:00 in the morning.

I went to sleep thinking about the Bushmen who had occupied these middle reaches of the Orange river until driven out by the advancing Boer farmers one hundred years previously. Ten years later we were to meet them in their original wild state in the central Kalahari to which they alone could adapt and lead a precarious existence in a terrain that had defeated even the trekboers for lack of surface water. But they left their paintings of hunting scenes behind them on the walls of caves where they had lived. In the sand of the cave floor could be found beads of ostrich egg and small worked flints. Wilcox describes how Boer Commandoes in 1790 had declared war against the Bushmen in the Eastern Cape. The Bushmen had ranged these lands for hunting from time beyond memory and here were Boers riding up in advance of their ox-driven waggons with herds of sheep and cattle, shooting and driving off their game. Cattle and sheep became the rightful prey of the Bushmen and many poisoned arrows were loosed on the Boers. In response they were shot on sight, or if captured alive, domesticated as

herders and servants. The slant eyed mongolian look of some coloured labourers along the river told of Bushmen ancestry. John Barrow, surveyor and explorer in the Arctic, and later to become a founder of the RGS and a baronet, played a recorded role along the river upstream of here in connection with the Bushmen hostilities[8]. In 1797 he was appointed secretary to the governor Lord Macartney at the Cape. He sent Barrow to make a better map of the limits of his province up to the river. He took with him some local Boer farmers who knew the area and enjoined them to make peaceful contact with the Bushmen and only fire if fired upon. Approaching the river past the kop outside where Colesberg is today and going through a defile they saw ahead the grass shelters of a band. Too late the Boers opened fire. In spite of this Barrow, having ordered a cease fire, managed to entice the little people down from the crags to which they had fled with signs of friendliness and offerings of food and tobacco. There was much parley and thanks to some interpreter they were told that if they desisted from stealing cattle and came unarmed to the farm houses they would be treated fairly and given sheep. He himself had had experience with the eskimo in Greenland and could evidently understand and appreciate these cultures and would there might have been many more like him up on this frontier. G.A. Farini described meeting Bushmen on his journey through the Kalahari in 1886 skirting the Schurve mountains north of Upington[9]. There may have been some still on the lower Orange River in the remote sections of the Great Bend at that time because as late as 1931 a band of them were unluckily discovered in the Aurus mountains of the Sperregebiet north of the Great Bend by a police sergeant named Van Zyl. He arrested 17 men women and children for murdering a hottentot. The suspects were put on trial and given eight months hard labour. The others were put to work on farms. Apparently after the rains they all made their escape back into the desert[10]. These children of nature could never comply with European law and never be absorbed into this new society but thankfully the survivors are now acquiring rights to lead traditional lives in the Gemsbok National Park of the northern Cape and in the Central Kalahari Reserve.

William Burchell, a naturalist and descriptive writer, visited this junction of the rivers in 1824 and described the damming up of the Orange by the Vaal in flood[11].

On taking a survey of surrounding objects, the first thing which struck me, and with no little astonishment, was the enormous height to which the waters of the river had risen above its ordinary level. Our waggons stood at the top of the lofty bank, and yet at this elevation, the water was not two yards below our feet. Nothing of the willows was to be seen but their highest branches, and many were quite covered by the flood. Even the Acacias in the second tier, appeared as if swimming in the stream, with their heads just above the water..... Yet it was not the Ky-Gariep which thus swelled its own stream, for that river five miles higher up was

[8] 8 Wilcox page 61,62.

[9] A Recent Journey in the Kalahari by G.A. Farini (Paper given to the RGS March 8th 1886)

[10] To the Rivers End by C.G. Green page 186-190

[11] William Burchell 'Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa' Vol 1, Longmans, from an extract in South African Explorers, Oxford University Press, 1954

at its natural level; but on directing my view a little downwards, I beheld the mouth of the Nu-Gariep rolling the Great River, a rapid and agitated tide of muddy water swelled to a terrific height that has been described. The trees bent forward by the violence of the torrent, kept bowing their half sunk heads, in submission to the mighty stream; while many of their less fortunate brethren, torn by the roots from the bank on which they had stood for half a century, were hurried unresisting down the angry tide. The name Gariep, is applied only to that part of the river below the confluence, while the branch which begins at the place where we Here now stationed is called the Ky-Gariep by the natives and the Vaal Rivier by the Klaarwater Hottentots, which in English may be rendered by Yellow River. We were visited by half a dozen Bushmen who sold us some honey. They were paid in tobacco stalks, pounded leaves or dakka, the true Bushmanic currency which here suffers no depreciation and appeared wilder and more savage.

He goes on to relate a gruesome story of what this tribe did to the leader of a hostile kraal which they had routed, and a feast rich in detail and gore of a hippopotamus shot in this vicinity.
Among these happy, dirty creatures, was one who, by her airs and dress, showed that she had no mean opinion of her personal accomplishments: she was, in fact, the prettiest young Bushgirl I had yet seen; but her vanity and too evident consciousness of her superiority, rendered her less pleasing in my eyes and perhaps a less desirable wife in the eyes of her countrymen; for the immoderate quantity of grease, red ochre, buku and shining powder with which her hair was clotted, would ruin any but a very rich husband.

The next six days to Prieska was among the best progress on the river with 128 miles canoed. The geology must have been softer shale rocks which gave some gentler shallow rapids but none of the volcanic rock dams and waterfalls. Of course we had the added water of the Vaal which nearly doubled the volume and the river ran in a single bed some 200 to 300 yards wide. From now on we would get no further running tributaries at this winter season, only abstraction for irrigation and the one big dam of the river, the Buchuberg dam.

James Sopper accompanied us for six miles as far as Katlani in his kayak type canoe. He would love to have gone further with us and we were sorry to lose his company. The rest in their company had done us good tho' Dave's foot was troubling him still from the burn. For two days we had headwind and splashing waves and it was cold in the overcast weather and wind. At night we had hard frosts which froze water left in the cans and gave a skim of ice on the margins of the banks. On Monday 29th June a very hospitable Afrikaans farmer, Mnr Lubbe, at Sakdrift, gave us a lunch and a dozen cartridges for the 12-bore on short acquaintance. We went on to make 25 miles and repeated this distance on the next two days also.

Wednesday, 1st July 1953
It was cold this morning with ice along the river's edge and thick ice in the billies as we got away early but saw guinea fowl and spent some time shooting as we were out of meat. Later we saw an otter swimming looking very much like a large black snake as it swam porpoise-like through the water - a possible explanation for

the Great Snake'? We are camping in an excellent spot with good firewood. 25 miles total 446.

As we zipped up our bags and Bill's bullet-shaped head pushed into the crook of my knees for warmth I stretched out one hand to fondle his ears. "You keep watch for the Great Snake, Bill, and don't let him in your bag, Dave!". "He's too used to the green sheets of Maselsfontein" said Dave, laughing. Bill shivered and pricked his ears with that low half growl half whine which acknowledged the myriad of little night noises from frogs to floating flotsam to small game or even a leopard, beyond the firelight. His tail thumped a response as I thought about this river legend like the Loch Ness monster. Sightings of the Great Snake had been made in the river below Upington but that was no reason why it should not swim upstream. L.G. Green collated the stories from his various visits to points on the river[12]. He writes that he has now gathered so much evidence from reliable people that he believes the Great Snake is something more than legend. In 1899 a Mr. G.A. Kinnear was taking some sheep and goats across the river at Upington in a flat-bottomed ferry boat. He was ten yards from the bank when the head of a monstrous serpent emerged from the stream. The head in which were set two large blinking eyes was from 7 to 8 inches wide and 8 to 10 feet of the body reared out of the water which could only have been about a quarter of its length.... Hendrick the boatman was terror-struck and the other natives holding the goats were screaming in their fear". Another witness was Fred Cornell in 1910 camping 20 miles below Aughrabies Falls. His American colleague named Kammeyer was bathing in a quiet backwater with cattle grazing at the water's edge. Kammeyer said that a wave surged past him and an open-jawed head of a huge snake emerged to a height of twelve feet and pounced on one of the calves and disappeared with it. The snake's body he said was as thick as a barrel. The Hottentots employed by Cornell had seen the snake on numerous occasions and claimed it was immune to bullets. At Pella mission father Wolf reported that the Hottentots complained that a great snake was taking their stock. A large serpent was seen near Sendeling's Drift by a prospector named Hayes in 1929 and near the mouth of the river by a shepherd in evidence collected by a police sergeant the same year. "Alright, Bill, come on in, its warmer and safer here", I murmured unzipping the top of the bag. Safer too from scorpions and spiders having the bag cover zipped up.

At Prieska the Reverend Clucas kindly put a room at our disposal while we collected and sorted mail and parcels from home and the Needhams. A new cradle had been made and sent up by rail. It was heavy and a bit too wide but we were very grateful for the trouble taken. A tin of biscuits and .22 ammunition were gratefully received. The news of our arrival spread quite rapidly. We had an invitation to dinner with the Burmeisters and next morning were visited by a reporter. In exchange for a report we used his car for shopping and to find a carpenter to repair the oars and rollocks. A second night out followed with Mr and Mrs Van der Byl so it was late again when we returned to our room at the rectory to write letters back home.

[12] Ibid pp 126-128

Our various hosts saw us off on Saturday 4th July. We had been forewarned about difficulties in the Pieska / Upington stretch but this day was easy going although the course ran between mountains and kloofs and where we camped a 200 ft cliff rose perpendicularly a few yards from a narrow flood bank of trees. We did 15 miles and 20 the next day shooting four rapids and still going through mountain gorges. Total 496. We noticed the diminishing volume of the river next day as we scraped through some shallow reef rapids and had to stop every two hours to bale out the boat. We were making for Westerberg mine with an introduction to Mr and Mrs Cambell, he the club manager. They gave us a wonderful reception, the first time anyone had called in by boat. He promised to make the canoe absolutely watertight. 15 miles total 511. So another rest day was spent while a qualified mine carpenter had the boat in his workshop and we were shown around the workings and wrote letters. Bill had some training and has now learnt the following - 'sit' 'wait' 'take it 'fetch' catch' boat' down' 'up' 'outside - that is to say providing that something moving does not catch his attention in which case he clearly thinks he hears the command 'fetch'. The canoe was finished next afternoon and duly launched empty looking for leaks which did not appear; but we were not to hurry away because in the evening we gave Mary Bowers a little trip on the river and she joined us for supper at the Campbells. I wrote that everyone has been exceptionally kind in Westerberg - indeed wherever we stop down this river of hospitality. They all gave us a wonderful send-off next morning and cars followed a track down the bank hooting and bidding us farewell. “Ons is gelukkige kerels, Ou Bees, but it is meeting and parting all the way". The river was beginning to be dammed up by the Buchuberg getting wider and deep. Dave rowed and I paddled for two hours after dark with a bit of moon glinting on the water, and thinking of these people we may never see again whose lives we had touched and they ours. 20 miles Total 531.

We had a long paddle of 12 miles up the Buchuberg dam to reach the dam wall in the evening. This was the only major man-made obstruction on the river at the time although there were weirs built at various places. But this dam was 22 ft high and 600 yards across with 68 sluice gates. Only one of these was open letting through 1300 cusecs (cubic feet of water per second). The volume that the superintendent could let through was at his discretion depending on information received of floods coming down from upstream and demands from the settlements downstream for irrigation. We spoke to him about this because clearly our success depended on an adequate supply and more rains would not be forthcoming this winter. From now on were stretches of braided channel and it was all desert and evaporation. Since the Buchuberg dam had been built information on the river's flow could be accurately gauged. The Orange has perhaps the greatest range of regime of any river in the world. In the floods of 1925 the discharge here measured 500,000 cusecs and a local tradition has it that in 1860 the flood waters were 20 to 25 feet higher. The variations are far greater and more sudden than on the Zambesi. According to Edward Rashleigh[13] the flow on November 20th 1933 was almost at zero. By the 2nd December it had risen to

[13] Among the Waterfalls of the World by Jarrolds, Ldn 1935

140,000 cusecs, in the middle of December it had dropped to 16,000 cusecs and by January 10th 1934 it peaked at 263,000 cusecs. The dam was the first to try to even out the flow downstream but anything over 75,000 cusecs soon filled it and besides all the sluice gates being opened the floods would spill over.

He said he would remember us for the next two months as he let through the precious water. We made only 8 miles next day negotiating through rocky channels and one weir that needed a portage. Bill fell off untied in a tricky place but managed to swim back alright. Then on Sunday 12th July we entered our first island paradise stretch. Beautiful it was certainly as the river divided into channels separating lush overgrown islands rich with birdlife, monkeys and baboons. But the consequence of the division was that the water flow was decreased and rapids were shallow and rocky. That night was an occasion for some adrenalin and alarm as to what else was lurking in the vegetation.

I was working in the dark on the canoe when out of the silent river some animal made a loud noise as of exhalation of air. Whether it was an otter or no I don't know but certainly it was alarming. We camped near a huge pile of drift wood and set it alight. The flames must have risen to 30 feet, a magnificent sight. 15 miles total 556.

We did 20 miles on the morrow, Bill again falling overboard when we hit a rock hard. On the 16th July was Dave's birthday (19 years old). My meagre present was a packet of biscuits and a slab of chocolate. We were in fact out of meat and cooking ‘vetcookies' only. We did 20 miles tho' the river was bad with rocks and much damage was sustained. Our estimated position was 2 miles from Karos and 30 from Upington. Total 636.

At Karos we lunched with Mnr and Mevrou Du Plessis who also gave us some bread. I phoned through to Senator Butler at Louisvale Farm near Upington to make contact as he had invited us to visit long since. (It was he in fact who had sincerely dismissed the venture as crazy but was not one to deny any assistance). A tricky rapid just before dark nearly caused an upset. Dave fell off and lost a paddle. I managed to steer on with the oars. The next day was another arduous one making only 10 miles as the river did crazy winds through myriads of streams and rocky islands. We rescued a goat stranded on a rock in mid stream. The boat leaked badly now. We came to a weir leading water off on both sides into canals which had to be negotiated. An aeroplane from Upington came looking for us, spotted us and waved as we were getting around the weir. Total 656 miles.

So we reached Upington next day in the evening, 19th July, after 12 miles of divided river, islands and rocks. James Butler collected us from the bank by the bridge leaving the canoe tied up and took us to the farm Louisvale for a marvellous clean-up and meal. We had done 668 miles from Aliwal North, crossed the Karroo with its dolerite kloofs and shale rapids and were now into the granite basement complex of old Gondwanaland with its islands and dense willow forests. The character of the river was changing and the best was yet to come. We were over half way and had to reach the mouth within seven weeks to catch the boat to England.

The Aughrabies Falls on the Gariep

We spent four days at Louisvale farm working on the canoe, which needed a completely re-bituminised bottom, and enjoying the hospitality of the farm, James Butler, about our age, and Wouter Reynecke the manager. I went out after guineafowl a couple of times. David enjoyed riding one of the farm horses. We enjoyed the contrast from the river routine and comforts of beds. Some reporters drove up from Cape Town but got scant information as we preferred not to publicise our exploit as too often hazards were exaggerated and caused concern to family and friends, whirlpools that would suck the boat down or canyons impossible to climb out of. We made no mention of The Great Snake.

Senator Butler, whose farm this was, had kindly acted as an influential ambassador on our behalf with Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, President of De Beers Consolidated Diamonds, and the only man who could give us permission to do the passage through the final 100 miles or so of the 'Sperregebiet'. While staying here news came through that this was approved. With no thought of discretion as to whose hands my flippant remark might get into considering the underworld characters like Scott who were retained in the Deanery, I wrote back saying that we were delighted with this news and would now be able to collect a whole heap of diamonds and make a secrete cache of them. There was no suggestion of tongue in cheek and I do wonder 45 years on whether my parents faintly believed that we might, as many had done before us.

Wouter Reynecke kindly loaded up the canoe on his pick-up and took us to the bottom of the Friersdale Falls, a rapid that drops some 30 feet in a short distance. These falls are named after a Canadian settler called Frier as is the island Friersdale which this pioneer transformed into a productive irrigation scheme around 1880. He gave hospitality to G.A. Farini at the time of the latter's Kalahari expedition. In the orchard grew bananas, figs, peaches, cherries, apples and pears and vines and he irrigated fields of wheat. The river below was contained in a narrow section with rocky walls. Thousands of pigeons roosted on the ledges of the rocks and it is refreshing to read Farini's account that they were unmolested by Mr Frier because he possessed no gun[14].

This portage meant that we missed out the widest and perhaps wildest section of the river from the standpoint of myriads of islands and streams. It is 7 kilometres wide below Cannon Island and twenty main streams are plotted on the 1/500,000 scale survey. With only 1000 cusecs of water in total and many more divisions than shown on the map we may indeed have got stuck here in impenetrable vegetation. Cannon Island itself is the largest, nine miles long and 4,000 acres of extremely rich fertile silty soil. In 1926 it was taken over by fifty enterprising land-hungry Boers against government policy as it was Crown land. They cleared the tangle of willows, mimosas and wild olives, constructed a weir upstream and led the water down a canal into irrigation channels and were soon raising a variety of crops for a self-sufficient harvest. It was against the law and they were ordered to leave by

[14] Through the Kalahari Desert by G.A. Farini page 430

the local magistrate. They refused to do so and declared themselves an independent republic. The Minister of Lands, one Piet Grobbler, came up in 1928 to see for himself this independent community and adjudicate. The government had spent lots of money establishing small communities on the river, building weirs and giving grants yet here these people had done it alone with no subsidies. Their industry appealed to him and he promised a case for title to the land which came about and a school was built for the children, thatched brick houses replaced the mud and wattle dwellings, the settlement really prospered even through the depression of the early '30s and the population rose to some 1000 souls. Then the river came down in that fearful flood of 1934 which the Buchuberg dam could do little to stop. The settlers climbed trees and gathered around the church on the highest ground watching all their homes and cultivation washed away, singing hymns and praying for deliverance. Denys Reitz did a flight over the flooded river then and perhaps it was he who organised a food drop by the SA Air Force over the next few days to the stricken marooned population.

It was in this area too that the engineer A.A. Anderson settled a while during his 25 years of odyssey in a wagon starting in 1860 when he really wanted to get away from the bustle of life in Walvis Bay. His book 'Twenty five years in a wagon' must make fascinating reading but of interest to our boat journey is the information by Green[15] that he built a corral type of boat of willows covered with skins and ballasted with rocks with a mast and lug sail and claimed that this was the first boat to sail on the Orange river[16]. He used it for crossing between islands where he found superb contentment shooting for the pot, sketching and fishing. "So enjoyable was the life, the daily sail on the river, reading under the overhanging trees as the boat floated quietly with the gentle current; that I decided to waste three or four months on its banks.... A life in the desert with all its drawbacks, is certainly most charming for there the mind can have unlimited action". However the river woke him out of his reverie one day when it rose 30 feet in two hours while his oxen were grazing on an island. Herd boys and cattle had to swim for their lives landing a mile and a half downstream.

Next day (July 26th) we reached Kakamas and made camp on a grassy island soon after midday. Bill was left in charge of the camp with a very firm "SIT and STAY!" while Dave and I crossed the stream and walked into the dorp to find Mr A.B. Collins to whom we had an introduction for advice concerning a landing point above the Aughrabies only 25 miles downstream. W*e arranged to canoe down to with a few miles of the falls and see Mnr Du Plessis at Omdraai farm. 4 miles Total 73*.

Monday 27th July 1953
We camped last night on an island and canoed across again this morning to go up to the dorp. We had two new rowlocks made, had a haircut, bought supplies and were given meat and oranges. The post came at 2.30 with mail and a parcel of 2

[15] Ibid page 95

[16] A.R. Wilcox page 68 found four previous accounts of boats built to cross the river but perhaps none did so much sailing or were launched for sheer pleasure as Anderson's.

paddles at the station. We left at 4.00 pm and canoed 3 miles down towards the falls. We are sleeping again on a very nice grassy island with a practically full moon making wonderful lights on the river. 3 miles total 736.

On the 28th we did 14 miles, much of it walking the boat through rocky shallows in very cold water and a chilly wind. But again we found the immense pleasure of a little grass covered island with trees somewhere near the end of Perde island for the night stop. A warm fire, a braai, an amicable agreement as to whose bag Bill should warm and the bruises of the rocks were soon forgotten in sleep.

Next day we reached the farm, Omdraai, on the north bank, after a couple of hours paddling and were invited by Mevrou Du Plessis to lunch. There were three brothers on the farm of which one was away in Cape Town. Dirk and his brother said we were invited to stay as long as we liked to see the falls and would help us to lift the canoe around the canyon. We were made most welcome. This was perhaps the highlight of the whole trip so dramatic was the Aughrabies and exciting the events of the three days. My own diary is a bit bland but I give it before quoting the impressions of previous explorers. But first, with reference to the sketch map found on page 125 of Rashleigh's 'Among the Waterfalls of the World' which I reproduce here with added notation, the farm Omdraai was on the north bank a couple of miles upstream and since the river was now at very low water it was possible to get the pick-up to the north bank opposite Corro island and walk dryshod across two flood channels that pass around the main fall on the north side. It will be appreciated that at normal to high flow of water the main falls had been inaccessible, except by powerful swimmers, whether approached from the north or south, the whole width of the river including the islands being some 3 miles, but after recounting our own visit I will briefly mention others experiences some of which were far more dramatic or fatal.

*Wednesday 29th July 195*3
W*e were taken after lunch to within a mile of the Aughrabies (the Hottentot name for 'The place of noise') from where* we *walked to the canyon and falls. The streams making the falls impossible to see in summer were now almost dry and* we *walked easily to the brink of the canyon.*
It was an extraordinary experience to see the falls for the first time. The scale of everything is huge making the falls look small although in actual fact they fall 450' into a huge rectangular canyon with 150' deep water *in it,* we were *told. This canyon, 500' of concave to sheer granite continues down for 11 miles*[17]*. Dave and I started at the brink of the fall inspecting that and then found other vantage points further down. We took several photos and then went to see about the prospect of climbing down to get photos from below. There* were *two possibilities both being narrow gorges on the north side cutting down into the canyon about a third mile below the falls. A*s *it was late we decided to recce with ropes in the morning.*
*On arriving back at the farm and about to have a bath the ne*ws *came in that the local leopard which lately had been killing sheep in the neighbourhood had been*

[17] In fact it continues I understand for about 6 miles with smooth near vertical sides.

cornered in a kopjie. So we piled into the lorry with the guns and raced against daylight to the mountains where they had surrounded this kopjie with fires. We were unsuccessful in finding it that night so sat up and dozed beside one of the fires to wait until morning. 5 miles total 755.

Thursday 30th July 1953
If yesterday was interesting today was moreso. Spoor proved that the leopard had escaped in the night so we abandoned that hunt. Dave and I got 120' of rope and set about finding a way down the canyon to the water's edge. It proved very promising and by lunch time we had fixed the necessary fixed ropes and left them to return in the afternoon. We came back with two rubber car tubes (the buoyancy tubes off the boat) and the camera. The climb down took about an hour using in two difficult places fixed ropes we managed it (to a ledge at the water's edge). The granite blocks in the canyon were huge but we managed to find a way through them and up the side of the main canyon to within 300 yards of the falls. From there on the sides were smooth and near perpendicular. We then undressed and climbed into the rubber tubes and sitting in them paddled another 150 yards nearer. The water was very cold and Dave nearly got cramp. The camera was on a belt around my neck.
It was impossible to go nearer because the water was becoming choppy and I doubt whether a photo would come out. I took 5 of the falls looking up and 2 looking down the canyon. The camera got a bit wet.
The Aughrabies strikes me as a most wonderful place but terribly awful! We are not sure whether photos have ever been taken from the water below. I don't think so, so I hope ours will come out. A most wonderful day.

In fact the ones taken by me did not come out, whether due to the camera getting wet or my inexpert manipulation I do not know, but one did come out showing me in a car tube taken by Dave from the bank. No mention is made of fatigue due to the previous night sitting up next to a fire trying to hold a leopard at bay, and the exertions of the day following but such is the adrenalin and energy of youth. Bill spent the night out with us but had no sleeping bag to get into. However he missed out on the climb down the canyon and was left at the farm to give me a reproachful look on our return.

The next day we did relax with letter writing and preparing kit, and Dave played some records on their radio gram. Danie Du Plessis took us by lorry the following morning 11 miles down where a track descended into the deep valley. Ahead lay the wild river of the Richtersveld and the Great Bend.

Before we leave Omdraai and the falls behind after nearly 45 years during which time one might expect a 3-day visit by two boys and a dog to have been forgotten, I was delighted to receive an answer to a letter I wrote on 11th December 1998 thanking them and apologising that a whole working life had gone by and asking about any changes to the area. Dirk Du Plessis answered, now 85 years old ‘fit as a fiddle on one string'. I copy his letter below. We chatted on the phone and good as his word he sent some photos of his vineyards, his pet camels and elands, some tourists at the falls showing the safety fence, and some leopards shot before the Nature Reserve was introduced. Bill would have been a morsel to a leopard and I

can see now why he growled at night and sought refuge in a bag. If any chance comes about, while Dirk is still playing on one string, I hope to visit him again and see the changes that have come about besides take some quality photographs. But if I do, I will prefer to sleep out and feel the vibration of the thundering falls which has been going on for millennia of time eroding away a deep canyon in the most solid granite complex through past periods when the average rainfall of southern Africa was considerably more than at present and will go on as long as rain and snow fall on the Drakensberg mountains. This is a place which at any time of water is awesome and in flood times is a terrifying maelstrom of water and foam as if all the forces of nature were doing their damnedest to terrify the spectator.

By flood volume and scale it is by far the biggest in Africa. It is among the top giants of the world in a table of comparison done by Rashleigh in his excellent study of the world's waterfalls in 1935. Of falls with a reasonable flow of water at flood times, only the Gersoppa in India is higher at 829' with a mean flow of 5387 cusces and maximum flood of 120,000 cusecs. The Aughrabies height is 450-480' (depending on height of water), mean flow about 10,000 cusecs (before all the modern dams were built) and maximum flow about 500,000 cusecs. What particularly distinguishes the Aughrabies is the narrowness of the top of the main fall, only some 20 yards wide (in normal to low water) whereas curtain falls like the Victoria are 1534 yards wide. This alters the perspective from one of tranquil beauty to one of awesome power. In extreme flood of course the whole 3 mile wide valley is filled and the canyon is filled from the end and both sides and there are numerous falls in all the tributary canyons such as the one we chose to climb down. A great flood on the Thames at Teddington is by comparison some 19,400 cusecs or 25 times less in volume.

As a student at Oxford a few months later, I was browsing in Blackwell's bookshop on Broad Street and came across Rashleigh's book. Besides visiting all the main known waterfalls of the world he devotes the best part of a chapter to the Aughrabies in a thoroughly researched and interestingly documented story. He was indeed very lucky to escape with his life and owes it to Mr. Ben Nel, farmer at Rooipad farm on the south bank and an extremely strong swimmer. It was February 1934, a time of moderately high flow just before that great flood of 1934 that destroyed the settlers work on Cannon island. Ben Nel knew all the islands which were within his farm and was acting as a guide to Edward Rashleigh in a bid to swim the channels and get to a vantage point on the north side of the canyon - probably the same one that Dave and I approached so easily at low water from the north side. The main bulk of the flow, some 10,000 to 12,000 cusecs was passing down the channel on the north side of Groot Island in a succession of deep and strong rapids. It was some 40 to 50 yards across. In spite of his apprehension that the entrance to one of the narrow gullies, that accelerated the waters over the precipice, lay only some 160 yards below this point, Ben Nel, with Rashleigh's camera and shoes tied around his hat plunged in and crossed after a stiff struggle. To quote Rashleigh, "I plunged in and followed him, but when I was almost across, being indeed within two yards of still water on the other side, I was suddenly swept back by some eddy into midstream again and carried down like a cork

towards the entrance to the gully. For a moment or two I thought I was lost. The velocity and depth of the current was great, and I seemed powerless to get out of it. Luckily, about 100 yards lower down two small rocks jutted out of the torrent towards the bank from which we had started. I made a desperate effort to get to them, and succeeded finally in reaching the lower one of the two and hauling myself onto it. There were still however several yards of swirling water between me and the bank.

Mr. Nel who had watched these proceedings with some concern, shouted across to me, but the roar of the waters prevented my hearing a word he said. Then, signing me to stay where I was, a direction I may say I felt entirely in agreement, he pluckily plunged in again and made towards me. For a few moments the speed with which he was carried down made me fear that he would be swept past me, but eventually, he too gained the rock and joined me upon it. It was, he then observed, quite the worst place I could have made for, but his arrival renewed my confidence, and after a minute or two we again plunged in together and managed to get back to the bank we had originally started from."

I love the understatements and the suppressed emotion. It must have been a close thing and we know from his other exploits that Ben Nell and his brother were incredibly courageous and strong swimmers. But so was Rashleigh courageous if not such a strong swimmer for in spite of this dance with death and the awful heat of the day he was not to be put off from their day's objective. They walked upstream through thick undergrowth and found a better crossing point, where with the aid of a log in Hottentot style they swam diagonally across with the current. He took several pictures from vantage points on the north side but in swimming back Ben Nell lost the camera! I am sure he was thankful to him however for his life. His chapter is well illustrated with photographs by others notably Mr P.C.B. Scott Hayward who with Mr Louis Kraft made a film of the falls that year.

At the time of writing and probably to the time of our visit in 1953, Rashleigh says that the only man to have seen the falls at a maximum flood was Mr Bertus Nel in 1925, like his brother a man of exceptional physique and an extraordinarily strong swimmer'. To rescue some sheep from the islands he swam two miles from Rooipad farm to Klaas island to bring them to higher ground. He spent the night on Klaas Island by the southern rim of the canyon near the falls. Next morning the flood had reached its peak. He described the scene as one that only the gods could have depicted. The whole of the upper canyon was full to the brim, with the raging flood overflowing its northern edge; while in addition to the stupendous mass, anything from 50 to 100 feet deep, passing over the crest of the fall, the high northern wall of the Grand Canyon itself, to an extent of fully 500 yards, had an immense additional and undivided cataract roaring over it, not a single crag being visible above the flood. At such times it is said that the noise can be heard 36 miles away and a great white cloud in the sky.

Some of Ben Nel's climbing exploits into the canyon are noted by Green. In August 1933 a family were picnicking at the top of the falls. One can imagine low water such as we experienced. Dirk Poggenpoel walked down the smooth granite to fill

his cup with water, slipped on wet rock and went shooting over the edge. One can imagine his sister and mother frantically raising the alarm at Rooipad farm. Ben Nel climbed down and a canvas canoe was lowered. He dragged the pool for hours finding depths over 140 feet the length of his drag, but found nothing. While climbing back out he noticed the pot-hole towards the top of the fall which the river at low state falls into first, and decided to investigate that. His body was found in that perched pot-hole. Dirk Du Plessis's recent photographs show a guard rail preventing visitors from a step too close.

When the explorer, George Thompson, visited the falls after Wikar (see below) but claiming first discovery of them, he was led to the brink by his Koranna followers, and as he approached the edge they grabbed him and he mistook for a moment their safeguarding action for treachery so aware were they of that lure of space and thunder that can turn a man giddy. His description is one of the best.

"It seemed as if we were now entering the untrodden vestibule of one of Nature's most sublime temples, and the untutored savages who guided us, evinced by the awe with which they trod, that they were not altogether uninfluenced by the genius loci. (Later).. The beams of the evening sun fell full upon the cascade and occasioned a most splendid rainbow, while the vapoury mists arising from the broken waters, the bright green woods which hung from the surrounding cliffs, the surrounding roar of the waterfall, and the tumultuous boiling and whirling of the stream below, striving to escape along its deep dark and narrow path, formed altogether a combination of beauty and grandeur, such as I never before witnessed". He named the falls 'King George's Cataract' but it is appropriate that the Koranna name stands.

Jacob Hendrick Wikar, is reputed to be the first white man to have seen the falls in September 1778 and again in May 1779 during his wagon travels along the river beyond the reach of the Dutch East India Company from whose services he had deserted. The name 'Aughrabies', he says, is from the Koranna Hottentot meaning 'Big waters' and the river is known locally (and still is) as the 'Gariep. He described that many hippo were swept over the falls to their death and the Hottentots would fish the carcases out below the canyon. The island belt of the river up to Upington must have been ideal habitat for the hippo although there are accounts of them right up the river towards Aliwal North last century. It is thought that the notorious distinction for killing the last Orange River hippo is due to Hendrick Louw in 1925 in a pool between Hohenfels and Grootderm near the mouth. Crocodiles there never were due to the cold winter water presumably but large game there used to be in plenty before this frontier was settled. Wikar describes a scene near Aughrabies "There I experienced the most unique and wonderful view of all my travels, getting a sight of animals in a crescent, of 12 zebras, 50 elephants, 5 rhino, 20 ostriches, 13 kudu and a great number of zebras, while hippos were sporting themselves in the river below".

What a blessed thing that a Nature Reserve has now been created at Aughrabies and I wonder if the hippo could be reintroduced and the lion? But of course the Nels and the Du Plessis who farm either side may not agree, more troubled as they

are now by leopards. But keep the wild places wild so that like the Koranna Hottentots we may tread with awe like a child.

I managed to get copy of G.A. Farini's book “Through the Kalahari Desert' first published in 1886, after a long search, and read with great interest his several days at the falls that he then named The Hundred Falls. He may have spent longer exploring them than intended because from his waggon camp somewhere near where Omdraai farm is now situated he and his photographer Lulu and an optimistic trader whose life he had saved in the Kalahari, named “I'll vatch it" after his catch phrase, made day trips crossing the tributaries trying to get good vantage points of the main falls. But on one of these they were caught out by a rising flood and had to perch for three nights on the highest point of a boulder which, judging by the vivid sketch by Lulu, was somewhere close to where Dave is seen standing in our photograph. The water cascaded down both sides of the main canyon, a tree in the flood nearly knocked them off their refuge. A little higher and they would have been swept away. Farini may have been described as a showman but he had dare-devil courage and excellent descriptive and poetic ability. He asks his readers quite unnecessarily to pardon the infliction of further description in prose by recording verses which their wonders inspired:

THE HUNDRED FALLS

We leave the arid waste and sea of grass,
Where lurk the dangers of the desert sand,
And climbing mammoth rocks as smooth as glass.
Behold a scene surpassing fairy-land!
We hear the murmur of the rippling rills
Combining with the voices sweet and long.
Of bright-winged warblers, whose rich music fills
The air with song.

Bright is the picture to the eye revealed
Of waving meadow, and of shady glen;
The land of paradise seems here concealed
By careless nature from the gaze of men.
Led by contending waters' angry sound,
We reach the jagged cliffs, and towering walls
Beneath which tumble, boom, crash, downward bound
The Hundred Falls.

Transfixed we stand, enraptured with the sight,
Upon the massive walls of silver grey,
Above the mighty waters foaming white,
With mirrored rainbows circling in the spray;
The torrent through its granite channel sweeps,
Impeded by grim rocks on either shore,

As oe'r the precipice it madly leaps
With sullen roar.

Scores of snow-white cataracts swiftly gush
From lofty crags, majestic, cold and bare,
Then headlong down the deep, dark chasm rush,
And quiver, flashing in the startling air;
Glittering in the mist, the tempest blew
The silver spray to the abyss below,
Like liquid diamonds scintillating through
A cloud of snow.

More dreadful than the powder's bursting blast,
Thank cannon roaring o’er the battle plain,
Louder than thunderbolts from heaven cast,
Or warlike engines heard across the main,
Wilder than the waves of a maddened sea,
Or earthquake, that bewilders and appals,
Were roaring, writhing, fighting to be free,
One Hundred Falls.

The River of Isolation

Below the falls for 400 miles to the Atlantic the river enters another world having cut a deeper valley through the desolately dry mountains, there are fewer settlements and in the main these are mission stations with some enterprising pioneer farmers who have built a weir and irrigate a strip of fertile floodplain. I had already seen the river at Goodhouse and Modderdrift but we speculated about the character of the course although if the altitudes on the map were indicative the gradient should be more gentle. We expected the channel to be narrower hemmed in as it generally is by mountains and with the precious little water we now had this would be welcome. It was the first of August giving us just a month to get to the mouth to meet that sailing date. We needed to keep up steady progress.

From Wabrand, 11 miles below the falls, we thanked Danie Du Plessis for all their help and kindness and paddled 12 miles on reasonable river running between high barren mountains. We camped somewhere close to where the American in 1910 saw The Great Snake take a calf in a quiet backwater but we had no such disturbance that night. The next day we did better helped by three 'shale' rapids although with the water being low these had to be walked through for fear of scraping on rocks. We were conscious of the increasing leaks in the hull and had to stop three times to empty the boat. Where we camped I shot a guinea fowl for supper and we enjoyed plenty of drift wood for the fire. 18 miles total 785.

On the 3rd August we reached the farm Bynabo. The owner Mnr Loubser was away but had kindly left instructions that we be given some meat by his servant. The river passed through high steep mountains with rugged crags and many baboons were seen. They barked at us and Bill would liked to have given chase as he watched them. The next day added 20 miles at least 12 of that in two hours quick easy going along a continuous rapid running stretch in a narrow channel. The ledge on which we camped was narrow as the mountain slopes rose up directly. Total 825.

A shepherd who spoke Afrikaans told us we were nearer Onseepkaans than we thought from the map but it took another three days as we did not expect to get lost in thick braided channels of undergrowth as we had near Upington. Again this was associated with granite rocks. We made 10 miles on the 5th and had the interest of seeing some otters as we hauled the canoe over rocks wondering which channel to take to find more water. But on the 6th we made a hard won 5 miles struggling through a maze of thick islands rich with birds, splashes of leguaans and unidentified noises. At one point we relayed loads forward and came back for the canoe. From midday to sunset we made less than a mile. Two geese were shot for the pot. 5 miles total 840.

On Friday the 7th in the afternoon we reached Onseepkaans and camped on the far bank. This was an advised postal collection point and we expected a parcel of much needed bitumen from Louisvale farm to repair the boat. The trader Collyer was here whom we had read about in Green's book. He had settled here some thirty years before having retired from the Cape Police. He greeted us a bit

suspiciously as if he doubted our motives for canoeing the river. This made some sense when one considers that the majority of people he had had to deal with in his career ranged from free-booters escaping the law to others making a cache of diamonds. The postmistress girl made up for any lack of welcome with welcome letters but sadly no parcel of bitumen needed for the boat. She arranged for a late lunch and that led on to supper with Mr and Mrs Collyer. We were about to cross over to the other side where the boat was when Mevrou Van Skalkwyk offered us a bed.

The next day, Sunday 9th, as we saw to various things like telephoning the Cape Times and Wouter Reynecke about the bitumen, other residents of Onseepkaans warmed towards us. Mevrou Van Skalkwyk invited us with Dirkie, the postmistress, to a braaivleis along with the Steenkamp family. This was very enjoyable and as we were late to bed she even brought us breakfast in bed. We really were being treated like kings. We left after a lunch loaded with bread, meat and 150 .22 rounds. Many of the settlement crowded around the pickup to wave us off. We were taken to the bottom of the Ritchie Falls

Monday 10th August.
*The river was interspersed with rapids today a*s w*e walked or lined the canoe through six. We have to walk more than we can shoot for fear of scraping the bottom on rocks. We reached a pump signifying the water take-off for Pella Mission and decided to walk the six miles to the mission in the dark. After a long and stumbling walk we found the place and were greeted by Monsieur L'Abbe Malery, the RC priest. He treated us marvellously with huge meal and locally produced wine. We spoke in a mixture of french and english Distance 15 miles. Total 860.*

I did not record how long L'Abbe Malery had already been the priest in charge (I think since 1947) but it was wonderful to receive a letter 46 years later in answer to my enquiry, short and to the point typed on a typewriter.

"Your letter reached me. I am not yet forgotten. I am still at Pella and enjoying good health. I still remember your visit. Since then things have changed and they are changing faster now, Zink, copper mines are developing in Bushmanland. It will improve the living standard of the locals. Bushmanland is still very dry and hot. Thanks ever so much for your good wishes. I remain sincerely yours."

It was signed in a shaky hand for he must be over 80 years old.

Green called this place an oasis in Bushmanland where I was always sure of a welcome - a group of white buildings and date palms where a deep peace rested like a benediction".
One Christian Albrecht of the London Missionary Society named the place Pella in 1812 after a mission in Palestine which had been a place of refuge from the Romans. Cammas Fonteyn was the earlier Dutch name for the spring that welled out of the sandy river bed. For a distance of a hundred miles or so southwards into Bushmanland there was no certainty of water in the pans for most of the year or years rolled together so many travellers arrived here parched and some died on

the way. Before 1800 it was a Bushman stronghold and they plagued the occasional trekboers who ventured into the locality for their sheep and goats. It had its ups and down as a mission. John Campbell, Robert Moffat and Heinrich Schmelen all served here but when Thompson visited in 1824 he found it deserted. For a time a French lieutenant Francois Gabrielle settled there with a Baster woman and built a house and garden from the ruins. A visitor in 1873 described the place as having been burnt and Bushmen were back on the mountain. Then in 1878 father Godelle of the LMS started it up but the heat was too much for him after six years. A brave Father Simon took up the challenge like Abbe Malery today and kept it going for fifty years. He lived up to his motto “I have grasped and will not let go". It was a six-week ox-waggon trek from Cape Town in those days. Green describes the most gruelling ordeal as he crossed the waterless stretch of pans in Bushmanland on his way up to Pella from Cape Town in 1822. His oxen died of thirst so he left on foot for the nearest farm but fell exhausted then knelt and prayed. A wandering native found him unconscious and revived him from a spring just one hundred yards away. A father Wolfe succeeded this priest with equal tenacity of purpose and from 1885 to February 1947 he gave his life to God at this place, building a cathedral with mud bricks baked on the banks of the river, wood cut from the willows on the islands to which he swam, limestone fetched from 100 miles away by ox-waggon; but it took shape as Hereros from South West Africa and Hottentots joined him in the work and helped make the gardens and plant vineyards. He died at 81 having only once returned to his native Alsace in 1910 and been terrified by the noise and bustle, at peace with himself and only two years after the golden jubilee of the dedication of the cathedral. I recommend the chapter in Green's book ‘Peace beneath the Palms' to fill out these bare details of this missionary outpost.

Malery very kindly took us in his buggy next morning to visit Peter Weidner's corundum saliminite mine, just 6 miles away. You may remember that I had met him with Mrs Molteno on our prospecting trip and he showed delight in this re-visit, particularly the wagging tail greeting by Biltong who recognised him as an old admirer. The mine was raking in his profits. He was a wealthy man at last but lost. none of his charm.

We launched away after lunch with the taste of good red wine in our mouths and made 8 miles before dark. Total 868.

Next day in spite of the leaks we made 18 miles, the river dropping over successive short-lived rapids and hemmed in by dark rocky kloofs as it was in the Colesberg area. We shot at least 12 and walked it through another 8 shallower ones. Three times we beached her to bail out the water. I shot two geese before we camped on a very small island with a single tree and a grassy bank. Total 886 miles.

Thursday 13th August.
The river turned chaotic today. We only made about 8 miles. It dropped with no break at all and was divided up into numerable un-navigable streams. All these united at one point to form a 30' waterfall which involved a 200-yard portage. We are sleeping at the waterfall hoping that the condition will be better tomorrow. The waterfall is a perfect miniature Aughrabies. I have just got up from writing this

to investigate a noise something is making nearby. Whatever it is is breaking branches just outside the fire circle and giving us frights. 8 miles total 894.

Friday 14th August
Another day of sheer chaos in the river and extremely poor mileage. For two miles the river stayed in one channel after the falls and then split up again into streams with dense islands and not enough water to progress through the tangle of branches and driftwood. We reached a place called Karamchab at noon and an old native gave us valuable and accurate advice about which streams to take. We think he is the first we have met who knows his little stretch of river well. We are sleeping tonight on Krapohl island about 10 miles from Houms mission, our next point of call. The river is dropping fast being one almost continuous rapid and (with this little water) practically un-navigable. 8 miles total 902.

This island is named after H.J.C. Krapohl, a surveyor who spent his career setting out farms in Bushmanland and then retired to irrigate land at Abbassas, some 20 miles down river from here, and also put his hand to waggon-making. According to Green he was a keen botanist and many succulents bear his name. Hot tho' it was, it was healthy and he lived into old age. Apparently, the date palms which are a feature of these settlements, were introduced by the author Rider Haggard who must have visited some of these rugged parts of the river and used them for his descriptions in *Alan Quartermaine* when the river took them through a desolate mountain region, sucked them into a subterranean stream, across a boiling geyser and into the undiscovered land of a lost civilisation. We would find out how much was imagination.

I was getting anxious about our time to finish the trip with the slow progress that we still experienced next day, but we merged out of the islands still in a maze of smooth granite rocks and each time took the greater flow. We reached Houms mission in the mid afternoon and were at once made very welcome by the German Father Steiner and the several Sisters. We were given a separate room each and two suppers each. Bill did not understand our separation and kept checking up. We had done 912 miles and the next 100 would take us to Modderdrift on a more gentle profile, according to the maps.

The mission all came out to send us off with parcels of meat and bread and such sincere looks of blessing in their smiling faces. We did 13 miles in spite of leaks that filled the boat every one hour which we hoped to fix at Goodhouse. A troop of baboons swam the river in front of us barking. Bill egged them on. Total 925 miles.

Next morning we reached Abbassas and dropped in on Mnr De Villiers for a cup of tea on his verandah overlooking the river. This was the spot that the surveyor Krapohl had developed single handed some years earlier. No rain fell there for seven years between 1925 and 1932. The river turned placid for the next 10 miles all the way to Goodhouse. We paddled on after dark on the broad stretch of moonlit water with the mountains in silhouette either side, bailing to keep afloat, and guided by the lights in Van de Heenan's house on the south side, until we nosed the prow into the ramp of the pontoon. The 'River Telegraph' had advised

Mevrou Van de Heenan of our progress and with accustomed Afrikaaner hospitality she showed us the guest room and had us into coffee and a meal by lamplight. We had done 18 miles total 943.

I recalled with them my visit with the Old Lady six months before in the Dodge and described some of the highlights of our adventures since. The name Goodhouse is a corruption of the Hottentot name 'Gu-daos' which means 'Sheep Ford'. For long it had been just a crossing point by wading or swimming until in 1913 when Carl Weidner, a Belgian entrepreneur, whose first experience as a youth had been working on the polders of the low country, came to settle here and decided to turn the bleak spot into an oasis. It was hard work but he was one of those pioneering characters that solve all the practical problems and with determination win through. He got a diesel pump working and irrigated the flat fertile flood plain putting a hundred morgen under citrus trees, vines, paw-paws and mangoes. Although the heat was extreme in the summer with temperatures going up to 125 F in the shade, the lack of severe winter frosts and sunshine throughout the year created perfect growing conditions. He built the pontoon that I described earlier and charged for crossings and sold produce to passers by. I mentioned earlier the amusing story of the poor motorist whose car ran off the pontoon midstream but Green tells another story illustrating Weidner's sense of humour. He was in dispute with the Minister of Mines about some prospecting claim and wrote an offensive letter comparing the Minister to a baboon. His secretary replied that the comparison was most objectionable. Weidner found a way of getting even by giving this Minister's name to his pet baboon. His visitors would be told the story and probably asked if they would like to see this Minister whereupon he would shout his name and the baboon would jump out of his box and come forward. No doubt guffaws of laughter followed to keep him young into old age. He confided to Green that he would love to drift down the river to the sea in a flat bottomed boat taking photographs as he went. He was a kindred spirit we would have enjoyed meeting.

Our much needed bitumen had not arrived in the post but Van De Heenan had some Laykold Tar and were helped by the two Hottentot pontoon men to scrape off the bottom and repair the worst leaks while we tucked into oranges in plentiful supply.

We had a fond send-off with a leg of mutton and plenty of fruit from mevrou and set off for Vioolsdrift 55 miles down river. The baboons and monkeys were tame as we drifted close to the banks. It was not a sight they had seen before and seldom would they see anyone walking either. We made excellent progress for three days covering the 55 miles in a pretty constant current with the stream as one and reasonably deep and the scenery ever changing with quite superb mountains up to 3000 ft on either hand and wild kloofs running in and infinite shapes of crag and rocks. We met two Hottentots on the second day who in Pidgeon Afrikaans like De Vries spoke told us where they thought we were. We confirmed position when we identified the mouth of the Haibrivier coming in from the North just after crags that rose to 2700 feet and opposite a mountain on the south side rising to a similar height. The third day of good hard going on Friday

21st August presented just one obstacle, a 12' high weir, to portage over. This led a canal down to the irrigation at Vioolsdrift which we reached as the sun was setting turning the hills on the south side rosy. Parcels of goodies were awaiting us including ammunition and paddles and special luxuries sent by Liza and David's mother besides news from mum, dad and JM. We camped in comfort on the river bank and celebrated the situation with a tin mug of sherry while preparing a meal that started with tomato soup, finished the rest of the mutton and went on to tinned berries, chocolate and biscuits. It was good to have covered by our reckoning just short of 1000 miles by canoe from Aliwal North with just the Great Bend of the river now between us and the coast. Bill approved of our situation too as he shared a slab of chocolate and settled down to the mutton bone. For him it was a life that could go on for ever. For us the end was almost in reach, 90 miles as the Fish Eagle flies, but 160 as the river runs in its circuitous course. There was not much in the way of settlements ahead but the river gradient was only two feet per mile hereon in spite of the 5,000 ft mountain ranges through which over time the floods have graded a channel to maturity. As this was our last postal opportunity I wrote home thanking my parents for their letters and the ammunition supplies and saying “we will soon be realising that this river does have a beginning and an end. We should get to the mouth by the 5th (September) which isn't hurrying things too much”. And a PS to my sister Bid “I hope Bid's tonsils don't worry her too much. Tell her it's jolly d having them out because all you eat is jelly and ice cream!”.

Vioolsdrift owes its existence to a group of road workers who during the years of great depression in the early thirties decided to start an irrigation scheme here some twenty years before our visit, and like those on Cannon Island, without any official permission. They built shelters for their families and worked part time at road making to earn some keep. The women and children worked on the road to the dam upstream and helped build the barrage. Government officials were impressed by this effort and money was voted towards it. But the markets were far and the roads poor for so many to make a living and many had to leave. But it supported a small community and the green trees were in welcome contrast to the barren mountains.

Rain is an unusual occurrence here but the 23rd August was a wet and windy day as we left Vioolsdrift. The wind picked up waves that were so great we had to stop at one point lest we shipped too much water. We called in at Modderdrift after a hard won 12 miles and were grateful indeed to Mnr Simon and his vrou for a welcome offer of a bed. It rained again the next day as we paddled around the first bend that swung the river North towards an unlikely poort called “The Seven Sisters' where by some strange accident of morphology the river of old cuts through a gap in mountains up to 4000 ft high (Mount Terror) while a broad valley of terrain below 1000 ft links Aussenkher with Modderdrift to the east of the present channel. Who knows but it may be an old flood channel. The intricate carving of the earth's face over millions of years according to many factors of geology, river capture, climate change, glacial action and the like create a puzzle of speculation which we could merely marvel at as spectators, in this brief voyage, of events that shaped this landscape over hundreds of millions of years, events

that started before the great Gondwanaland started to split up and South America and Antarctica started to separate off as floating plates as hypothesised by Wegener and now proven and measured with the precise satellite position finding systems of today.

In spite of rain and wind in this, among the driest of the world's deserts, we were able to marvel at the scenery as the current drew us along. This section of the river, which we were navigating for the first time (unless the Phoenicians came up the river by boat to found the 'Lost City of the Kalahari' some 3000 years before) is well chosen today by Africa Travel On-Line whose canoe trips are on offer on the Internet (htttp:www.atol.co.za/bundi/tour007c.htm). They now run canoe trips beginning at Vioolsdrift and paddling down for 95 kms to Aussenkehr. I am seeking permission to include their advertisement description and would not argue with their promotional language “mind expanding and unforgettable'.

In spite of rain and wind we made good 15 miles and dried out over a fire. Distance 1024 miles. Next day, 25th August, was further eventful for the rain continuing into a third day, the river quite unexpectedly dropping over some rapids (the picture in River Adventures may be one of them) and that Bill, fed up with shivering wet aboard the boat, went off chasing goats and had to be rounded up two miles away when he sheepishly came in with blood on his neck and a laughing tongue lolling out of the side of his mouth. So we made only 12 miles (total 1036). On camping we strung up some canvas as a shelter. “Dave, rain at this time is unheard of but let's take no chances”. I told him about De Vries' tin trunk being swept away during supper and found half way up a bush and he like we were getting “So nat soos n nat hoender!”. These expressions made us double with laughter like someone we met further back up the river who, describing the heat in the summer months, said "Self die leguana le onder die water en sweet!” (Even the leguaans lie under the water and sweat). We still had some goodies from Vioolsdrift and banter like this kept us in great spirits in spite of the drizzle.

The weather gods decided that enough rain had fallen, sufficient perhaps for the next few years and it dawned clear on the 26th. We made good progress and reached Aussenkehr in the afternoon. We were made welcome by a German couple Mnr and Mev Reck who were living in a new pre-fabricated house built near the old ruin. As they were driving the 100 miles to Karasburg in the morning, their nearest place, they kindly made sure that we were fixed up with food and accommodation that night. Green describes this place as a beautiful stretch of the river, an ideal place for an extreme isolationist. The ruin was the original homestead of the Petersen brothers who had sold their hotel in Liverpool in 1887 and must have been searching for seclusion as well as a dry climate for one of them suffered from tuberculosis. They hauled a steam engine by ox waggon from Port Nolloth and used it to power a pumping station and irrigate crops of fruit and vegetables. After some ten years of, one hopes, rewarding life for such effort, the consumptive brother died. It then had a chequered history while their mechanic tried to make ends meet and then a retired policeman called Price; but from around the beginning of the century it lay abandoned until a couple of years before our visit when the Recks settled there.

They were in a hurry to see what we needed so I never got their story. But they had a three year old son and by one of those wonderful fates of chance, my letter 46 years later sent to Aussenkehr thanking them for their hospitality, was forwarded to their son, Karl Heinz-Reck at Beauvalon near Alexander Bay, who wrote advising that his parents had passed away in 1980/81. How long they lived on at Aussenkehr I have yet to learn.

He, in the spirit of his parents, has done a great deal to explore and document the trails of the Richtersveld that link up old prospectors mine shafts and isolated farms. He sent me a copy of "Tracks and Trails of the Richtersveld' now in its third print run. He says in the introduction "My obsession to find out what it was that had lured so many prospectors and mining companies into the Richtersveld since the early eighteen hundreds led me to follow the old trails and to record many of the activities I came across in this rugged mountain desert....I found the mountain desert environment intimidating due to its maze of hills and gorges. In those days the tracks were hardly used and every gorge hill and mountain looked the same. By the time I returned, my tracks had been erased by the wind or supplanted by those of animals.." He covers by motorcycle 94 tracks and several thousand tortuous miles giving informative history, translation of old Nama (Hottentot) names and photos of features and places. He like others before him and Old Mrs Molteno was answering that call of the wild and finding out what was just over the next hill or at the end of this or that valley. His book is a guide and invitation but the traveller even today should be prepared to be self-sufficient, for no information is given on any fuel or water supplies other than the river and a few wells. I would also caution a traveller here to carry a map with a coordinate system on which he can plot position by astro fix or GPS satellite receiver as this is lacking on the diagram of trails as are contours which can be a good guide to position.

On the 27th in clear perfect weather after the rain, and having worked on the canoe to stop a few leaks, we left Aussenkehr and made ten miles to the mouth of the Gamkab river. We shot an easy rapid and were amused that this rapid was marked on the map as 'rapids' the first other than certain waterfalls, to be shown on the maps to date. Total 1064 miles. We made 15 miles next day some of it due west again until starting to round the Stormberg (3500 ft) in a northwest direction. We saw a herd of wild Afrikander cattle led by a huge bull and were a bit concerned at Bill starting to give chase until he thought better of his chances.

Saturday 29th August 1953
It was a pleasant surprise this morning to find that we had practically reached De Hoop the evening before. We found Mnr and Mevrou Avenant at home in their simple reed house next to the river. The river dropped steadily all day. We did not do much mileage because we spent a long time at the Vis Rivier mouth where we talked to a Skaapwagter' who had lived there for 20 years. He had never heard of a bushman painting of The Last Supper as described near this point by L.G. Green. 12 miles Total 1091.

The Avenant's home was the simplest and perhaps most isolated of all the homes we passed on the river. It was 120 miles of stony track to Port Nolloth across the Richtersveld. Here Paul Avenant lived with his wife Daisy and raised in all 11

children, one of which is clinging to her skirt in the photo. At least two died as young children as there is a photo of their grave shown in Reck's book. Daisy was the sister of Albert Viljoen who stayed at Klipheuvel further down river. According to K.W. Reck they stayed there from 1926 to 1959 when they were forced to move as the area was all declared a Nature Reserve. An interesting note on the name 'Kook rivier', the bed of which is the track to De Hoop at its mouth, is that it means 'boil river' which is what it appears to do in flash floods and wrecked vehicles (presumably of the Avenant's) bear witness to these sudden dangers.

Daisy Avenant gave us a loaf of home baked bread as we left for the few miles to the junction with the Great Fish Rivier. The bushman inscription, which we failed to see as the Shepherd could give us no information, and we were too impatient to stop and search, remains an enigma. The information is from Green. “On a rock in the Orange River you will find the strangest Bushman engraving in all Africa. The place is so lonely that I doubt whether any scientist has examined the engraving. It depicts The Last Supper. The Rev Heinrich Kling, one of the Rhenish missionaries at Steinkopf in Namaqualand vouched for the existence of this mysterious engraving. He gave the position as opposite the point where the Great Fish River enters the Orange, roughly 90 miles from its mouth. The scene pecked out on the water worn rock with stone tools showed twelve men sitting at a long table and one standing”. A theory is that an English missionary named Threlfall was murdered hereabouts in 1823 with his assistant, being stoned by Bushmen as they slept and their wagon was looted. Maybe his bible, illustrated, fell into their hands and this scene was copied. It is intriguing. We should have searched the whereabouts ourselves and not relied on a broken Afrikaans description given to the ‘Skaapwagter'. I liked the respectable tweed jacket he was wearing looking smarter than we were. But we saw no sign of a house. That Fish River canyon that we passed by looked intriguing. We agreed to put it on the list of places to visit - sometime - like the Cunene and Blue Nile which were rivers we discussed as yet to be navigated.

A place-name on the river we passed that day between De Hoop and the Fish River was Stuiweoog (Stareyeye). The origin of this name given by Green goes back a few years when there were still hippo in the river. A Hottentot and a hippo came unexpectedly face to face on the bank and both stared at each other in fright. But the Hottentot held his stare and the hippo gave way. There were many hippo in this part of the river up to 1915. But the fine for shooting one was only 10 pounds and more could be made from sale of the hide. The last was shot at the farm Grootderm on the coastal plain in 1925 when Hendrick Louw found himself insecurely placed between the river and his homestead. We were sorry they were no longer part of this scene and hoped they could be reintroduced to wallow in the mud and graze the reed banks in security once more.

We did 18 miles next day around the top of the Great Bend with the Sandbergswartkranz and the Pokkiespramberge on the south side and camped where we had a view of the valley opening out towards the coastal plain and an estimated altitude of 150 feet and about 80 miles only to go. I thought we might make the mouth by the 3rd September.

Sendelings Drift (the ford of the missionaries), reached next afternoon was a police post corrugated iron one-roomed hut manned by two Afrikaaner constables sent to this bleak outpost for some behavioural misdemeanour in the service. They were aged about 22. Their responsibility was to check on unauthorised entry into the 'Sperregebiet' or forbidden diamond zone. To relieve their utter boredom they lived in a nearly permanent state of intoxication. Our visit, probably the only one they had had for some weeks and certainly the only one by boat was a great relief to their senses. With no formal questions we were plied with a beer. We were to learn that their relaxation combined with the weekly visits by jeep to collect supplies from Port Nolloth was to drive the jeep over the bumpy rutted tracks as fast as it would go. Unfortunately I gave them a good excuse to make an unscheduled drive to Alexander Bay.

I was heating a tin of tar over an open fire in the morning bending over it and stirring, as was normal for boat repairs, when it exploded. The hot tar splashed over my face and chest and I came up to the hut pretty blindly with my hands over my face. Such is instinct that I must have blinked a moment before contact or I could have been blinded. As it was the hot tar stuck to face and chest and scalded. Dave was excellent with his surgical skills in swabbing off the worst but in case my eyes were damaged it was decided that the doctor in Alexander Bay should take a look and our hosts readily agreed with this. It was 60 miles of bumpy track. My eyes smarted so I could not take in the scenery, but our constable needed no excuse to waste time and we got there in an hour. A Dr Wiid had us to stay the night and dressed the burns and no problem about expenses, all on the mine. We collected our post waiting for us in the morning and being pronounced fit our constable driver brought us back to Sendeling's drift as if it was a jeep rally. It was the 2nd September. We arrived back by 3.00 pm and left by 4.00 pm covering 4 miles in the low river before dark. Total 1113 miles to date.

The river ran below high flood banks of gravel. This is the area where later in 1970 the O'Kiep Copper Company opened the Octha mine for diamonds and made big finds. Reck in his book has a picture of the Octha Club house built of rock atop a cliff on the bank of the river and apparently the 1987 floods were so great that the river rose just above the floor of the building. The flood must have been remarkable for the valley is less confined here.

Here I must digress for a moment to mention one of those extraordinary coincidences that happen in life. Having just reached this point in a journey 46 years before where a diamond mine was opened up at Octha I met that evening in Nicosia a Greek Cypriot by the name of Spyros Stavrinides who had been at Keble College Oxford. In our short conversation we found a common interest in solar energy and the next day he advised me of a seminar on the subject in Nicosia. I was reluctant to return the long drive to Nicosia but did so. To my amazement the team giving the seminar on desalination by solar energy included two colleagues I had worked closely with on this subject in Jordan ten years before. But the sponsor of the team was none other than the owner of the Octha mine, one George Christodolou, currently the Chief Executive of the Gulf Group of Companies. We had a short chat after the seminar when he said that he had

discovered major finds deep in an old bed of the proto-Orange, so rich in stones that Julian Thompson, head of de Beers, suspected him of 'salting' the claim. I expect other anecdotes of this “Sperregebiet section of the river will follow as he prospected widely here.

For us it was lack of water now as the sands of the Daberass dunes and the plain were soaking up what there was. We made 15 miles on the 3rd September pushing her through shallows. My eyes were certainly not too bad as I note that I shot two pidgeons for supper.

Friday 4th September 1953
Today was an eventful one as we said goodbye' to Liza, the canoe. We *were constantly finding the river too shallow and progress too slow. We carried her up to high water mark on an island and left her neat and hidden, with tubes, lantern, paddles, oars etc neatly stowed in her. When the river gets 13 feet of water she will drift away and be carried out to sea 30 miles away. We packed our rucsacs and walked all afternoon. It is much tougher than canoeing but under the circumstances, much faster. Distance 15 total 1143 miles.*

Not much sentiment here and there never is much in my terse journals. Hassle had repeatedly said in the kitchen You've got ter be tough, Master Peter'. Well it wasn't really tough to have to walk but it was tough abandoning that canoe that had served the three of us so well, that had come through so many rapids and hit so many stones, skirted whirlpools and steered just clear of overhangs in cliffs, carried us and the stores so bravely, been a home to Bill for four months and was well named after the girl at home base, that we both then loved. Dave was more the poet and philosopher than I. I was more the doer. The packs were lighter than on the Rockeries Pass in Basutoland but it was turning hot for a desert walk in broken gym shoes and the glare off the sand touched the face and chest still sensitive from scalding tar. Bill was quizzical, looking at the packs, at each of us and the boat and hanging back as we walked off. Come on to heel, Bill, can't carry you as well, the sand will cool off later'.

There is nothing better for the mind than walking often keeping tune or miming a poem. We had left Liza the canoe. The journey was nearly over. Ahead was a short homecoming and Liza herself who had done so much to make this trip memorable for us both.

> Oh Mistress mine, where are you roaming?
> O, stay and hear! Your true love's coming,
> That can sing both high and low;
> Trip no further, pretty sweeting;
> Journeys end in lovers meeting,
> Every wise man's son doth know.
>
> What is love? 'Tis not hereafter;
> Present mirth hath present laughter,
> What's to come is still unsure:
> In delay there lies no plenty;

Then come kiss me, sweet - and - twenty!
Youth's a stuff will not endure.

How true the uncertain future too that the river of life would keep us three united in adventures and plans for adventures for another six years. The river brought us together and we finished it but the canoe left high and dry was symbolic for she left me for Dave and I left her for another all in the unknown future ahead and surely for the best for all concerned except for my unlucky wife to be who was to be dragged through adventures yet to be told in this story before we grow old.

But looking back was not uncertain except in the final stages of another adventurer with two canoe type boats made of canvas. Around 1886, according to Green, Adolph Luderitz arrived on the North bank of the river from his trading station at Angra Pequena some 120 miles to the North. He came by waggon and had been exploring the hinterland for minerals. He had a Swiss mining engineer, a Scottish miner and a sailor from his schooner, we presume left at Angra Pequena. He launched two folding canvas canoes at Nabas Drift, a bit more upstream from where we were, and had a difficult journey down to Arries drift, twenty miles from the mouth, because the water was low and they scraped through the shallows and the boats had to be carried fifty times. At Arries drift the two miners left them to return overland having failed to dissuade Luderitz and his sailor companion from their boat voyage up the coast by sea. It was brave or foolhardy. They got the boats to Alexander Bay with the help of two porters, loaded one of them with food for a fortnight, water in a canvas bag and a mast cut from a tree with a sheet for a sail and waved goodbye. That was the last time they were seen. He became a legend like Colonel Fawcett. But fragments were found on the beach 25 miles North of the mouth by the surveyor named Klinghart. If they could have got beyond the surf they would have had the current with them. Their boat was about the same size as the canoe Liza but certainly they would not have had rubber car-tube stabilisers, and a sail with no keel mentioned suggests nasty instability. It was shoals that kept Bartholomew Diaz some way off the coast when he reached this far south on his historic voyage on 31st December 1492 in his caravel for he failed to notice any discolouration of the sea and missed the fact that a large river emptied here. Had the rains failed so late that year that the sand bar was still closing the mouth[18]?

This place, Angra Pequena, to which Luderitz was bravely heading by canoe, was named by him as Angra Das Voltas (Bay of many tacks). He put ashore here three negresses brought from the Congo whose skeletons were later excavated and became museum exhibits. The place name was changed again later to commemorate the merchant adventurer Luderitz.

So we covered 15 miles that Friday and were happy to put down the packs and make our last fire on the bank of the river. On Saturday 5th September we trekked on 10 miles to Arriesdrift by noon and another five to Brand karos, the irrigation

[18] Information from 'Congo to Cape' by Eric Axelson (Faber & Faber) 1973

farm for the mines. Here a pick-up gave us a lift the last ten miles into Alexander Bay. We were welcomed by Dr and Mrs Wiid as "guests of the State".

My diary ends there but I recall our amazement as we were shown around the mine workings and the final sorting room of the dazzling diamonds that at no time were we searched or questioned on any diamonds that we may have found on the journey. No questions were asked about where exactly we had left the canoe. We were taken on trust and so it should have been

We were indeed the richer for the experience but the river owed us nothing. Indeed quite the reverse we owed the river itself and the kindly people all along its banks more than words can say. It became 'our' river, a living experience of only four months but running through the rest of life. When later reading of big dams that flooded miles of river I felt dismayed on the one hand that those stretches could never again be explored, but sympathetic with the engineering purpose to even out its floods and droughts

After a bath and clean-up we were taken to the mouth itself. A small section of the sand bar was open and we looked at the surf where Luderitz had rashly gone out to sea. For much of the year at low river the bar closes and dams the river back up when the first floods come down. It is then dramatic when the sand barrage finally begins to quiver and give way. It goes with a roar and the muddy floodwater pushes out miles into the Atlantic the current carrying its load of silt and stones and diamonds as it has for millions of years. The Benguela current carries the suspended sediments northwards. A more recent aerial view of the Consolidated Diamond Mines opencast workings just offshore show these stretching for miles northwards along this shore line. The Great River, the Gariep, the Orange has been making South Africa and adjacent South West Africa (now Namibia) one of the worlds biggest diamond producers. Ertha Kitt was shortly to sing her hit number in that earthy sexy voice "Diamonds are a girl's best friend". Bill thought of none of these things but was fascinated by the waves.

"I wanted to say thank you to Pete for everything but Biltong shook his head; so we just stood and watched the river meet the sea, mingle with it and become as one. Even now in the heartbeat of London I can feel the undercurrent of these mingling waters. The sun was hidden behind the clouds. The breeze that blew from the ocean was filled with softness, like a little flame dying out in the darkness, and as ever, in the rhythm of the waves breaking on the shore there was a profound peace"[19]

I was not one for words but Dave knew my thoughts that we had made a great trip together, thoroughly enjoyable with plenty of unknown around the next bend and enough hardship to make it a bit more than a picnic. We shared it all equally. And especially we appreciated the hospitality and help from every person we met all down the river. Without them all it would have been quite a challenge. As it was

[19] from a journal Dave wrote at London House, Guildford Street, London in the winter of 53/54

it was like a relay journey of goodwill and kindness leaving countless memories of good people and incidents.

Now we had to leave and get to Cape Town by lifts and trains and there the Cape Times reporters invaded our homes for a splash of news in the weekend paper TWO BOYS *(*AND A DOG) Canoe 1,100 miles to the sea. We gave a talk to friends of the Cathedral showing the photos Dave had taken. Parents had been working behind the scenes for our departure by boat for England within the week of our return. But there was time for one more memorable day on Table Mountain. As the boat hooters sounded and hankies waved from family and friends and wiped tears from eyes I wondered why I should leave all that was so dear in family, friendships and wild country. But Hassle was there watching and waving and Scott, who was sure we had some precious stones, was keeping a lookout for plain clothes police. For Dave and myself, once Table Mountain was out of sight, this was another adventure, but a picnic and we could relax and enjoy it as best we could without Bill and his devoted look. For every good thing there is a price to pay but the separation from that dog was bad and tho' they tried their best for him on the farm of Liza's sister he thought he could chase everything that ran. His love of freedom killed him. He should have been the first dog to go to Oxford but for an age in quarantine which would have killed him equally. He had had his moments. Dave wrote in his journal:

"Every moment of the trip he loved and every moment he took for granted. We taught him to do many things and he did many things which we never taught him at all. Even when, as he grew older, he used to disappear after farmer's cattle or mountain goats, we could never really be angry with him, and maybe the evening would find him down at the water's edge biting the bubbles as they floated past him. At night he was in great demand because he was small enough and it was chilly enough for us to want him in our sleeping bags, and he was indeed a most efficient hot-water bottle. As he grew up and got bigger he was given a sack of his own. He was so stupid and so wise; he was a genius among dogs."

One of the things that turned up in a trunk of old papers in a sortout this year (1999) was my Post Office savings book. It gives an idea of the value of savings and the costs of this trip. It was opened in 1943 with a deposit of 5/- and accumulated with gifts up to a pound until it reached 10 pounds 2/4d in 1953. The only withdrawal had been 4 pounds for a nylon rope. Mrs Molteno's pay of 20 pounds was a significant credit on 20th April 1953 and thereafter were small withdrawals at six post offices down the river between 1 pound and 5 pounds until just 3 pounds 10 shillings were left to be withdrawn before sailing. Of course in those days money went much further than today and we did live off the land and enjoy hospitality, but still, as Mamma Grunchie, a frugal old cook in Ghana used to say "You make him go reach!'.

THE END of PART ONE