

No mountain too high



I should probably be writing about something serious like our finance minister's second attempt at making a budget speech, but I can't, because I'm trapped in the Drunkensberg, Drakensberg. Whatever.

Since Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife runs this camp, the Wi-Fi is about as dependable as Cyril Ramaphosa's promises. This means I can't do any research, which is just as well given that the internet has become a repository for lies and deception.

I didn't want to come here. I'm a sea person. If I stray too far from the ocean, my inner compass spins out of control and I can't be held accountable for my actions.

The Bad Green-Eyed Woman insisted that I show her some Bushman paintings. I told her we don't call them that any more. She arched an eyebrow. "You don't call them paintings?"

Once the confusion had been cleared up, I showed her a few photocopies of San art I keep to remind myself that I'm not the only one who can't draw to save his life.

Apparently this wasn't good enough. She wanted to see the real thing. This is the problem with people from Europe. They come to South Africa thinking they can hop on public transport and be whisked to their destina-

tion within a few minutes. When I told her we'd have to go to the Drakensberg, she suggested we take a bullet train. I said I'd rather take a bullet than a train. I explained that our railway system had been destroyed by an organised crime outfit known as The Government.

"Then you shall drive me there," she said, indicating that I should refresh her wine glass. I refreshed her memory that I wasn't her servant and went off to pack the cooler box. "And I want to go to Lesotho," she shouted after me. I slipped in an extra bottle of Havana Club.

She'd heard Donald Trump recently describe Lesotho as a country nobody had ever heard of and seemed to think that going there would somehow prove him wrong.

I said there were easier ways to prove the tangerine pustule wrong. A simple Google search works every time.

Seven hours later, we drove into Underberg. It's only three hours from Durban but my friend has the navigational skills of a barnacle and I refuse to use GPS because I won't have a woman telling me what to do.

"Take me up Sani Pass," she purred. Of course, dear. But not in my ancient Subaru. Normally, I'd far rather drive myself than share a Toyota Landcruiser with nine Germans, even if it meant risking death, but they won't let you onto the pass if you don't have a 4x4. So we put our lives in the capable hands of Bongani. He took us up a road in such appall-

ing condition that I wondered if Panyaza Lesufi was somehow involved in its maintenance.

Between the SA and Lesotho border posts lies a stretch of no-man's land. "We could murder someone here and get away with it," I said, leaving the Germans with no illusions as to who I was talking about. This is what happens when I'm forced away from the sea.

I guzzled a brace of Maluti beers in the highest pub in Africa while the Bad Green-Eyed Woman took photos of unsmiling Basotho shepherds. "Their balacavas are very chic, the blankets not so much," she said, toss-

ing back another glass of Chardonnay. Before we left, I took a photo of her next to the Welcome to Lesotho sign which she intends sending to Trump. She has her middle finger extended.

A day later, I pointed the Subaru's snout towards the Central Berg and the San scribbles she inexplicably wanted to see. She's an artist. It's pointless trying to understand these people. All you can do is humour them and hope they don't stab you in your sleep.

In 1994, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife was given the onerous task of taking over management of the province's conservation areas from the Natal Parks Board and running them into the ground. Not an easy job, but they rose to the challenge, often helping poachers in their work while training employees to be sullen and slow and kitchen staff to produce overpriced and bland meals.

A sheet of paper taped to the

reception desk at Giants Castle Camp told us that the Main Caves, billed as South Africa's premier rock art site, were closed. A fire had damaged them.

My sidekick was crushed. Somehow this was my fault. Why did I not know about this fire? I shrugged and asked the receptionist how long the site had been closed. She shrugged. Some time last year. Maybe August? Also, Champagne Pools were closed. Had sharks been spotted? I didn't want to ask. If a cave can catch fire, anything's possible.

Refusing to accept the terrible news, the sidekick insisted we walk to the caves to see for ourselves. I tried to talk her out of it because it was a 3km round trip and all I had was a T-shirt, shorts and slops. Not exactly suitable for a hike of this magnitude.

Halfway there, the Berg unleashed one of its spectacular thunderstorms. On we ploughed, me slipping and sliding, she cursing in a mixture of English and French. Soaked, we arrived at a locked gate.

A sign said the site was "temporarily closed following a fire incident that burnt the entire northern part of the cave". That sign's been there for months. The lock is rusted shut. In this country, temporarily is often a euphemism for permanently.

Unable to concede defeat, she began wriggling under the fence, barbed wire snagging her flesh. With blood running down her arms, she disappeared into the bush. The thunder grew louder, the rain pelted down. I silently cursed the San of 10 000 years earlier.

Why did they have to paint at all?

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