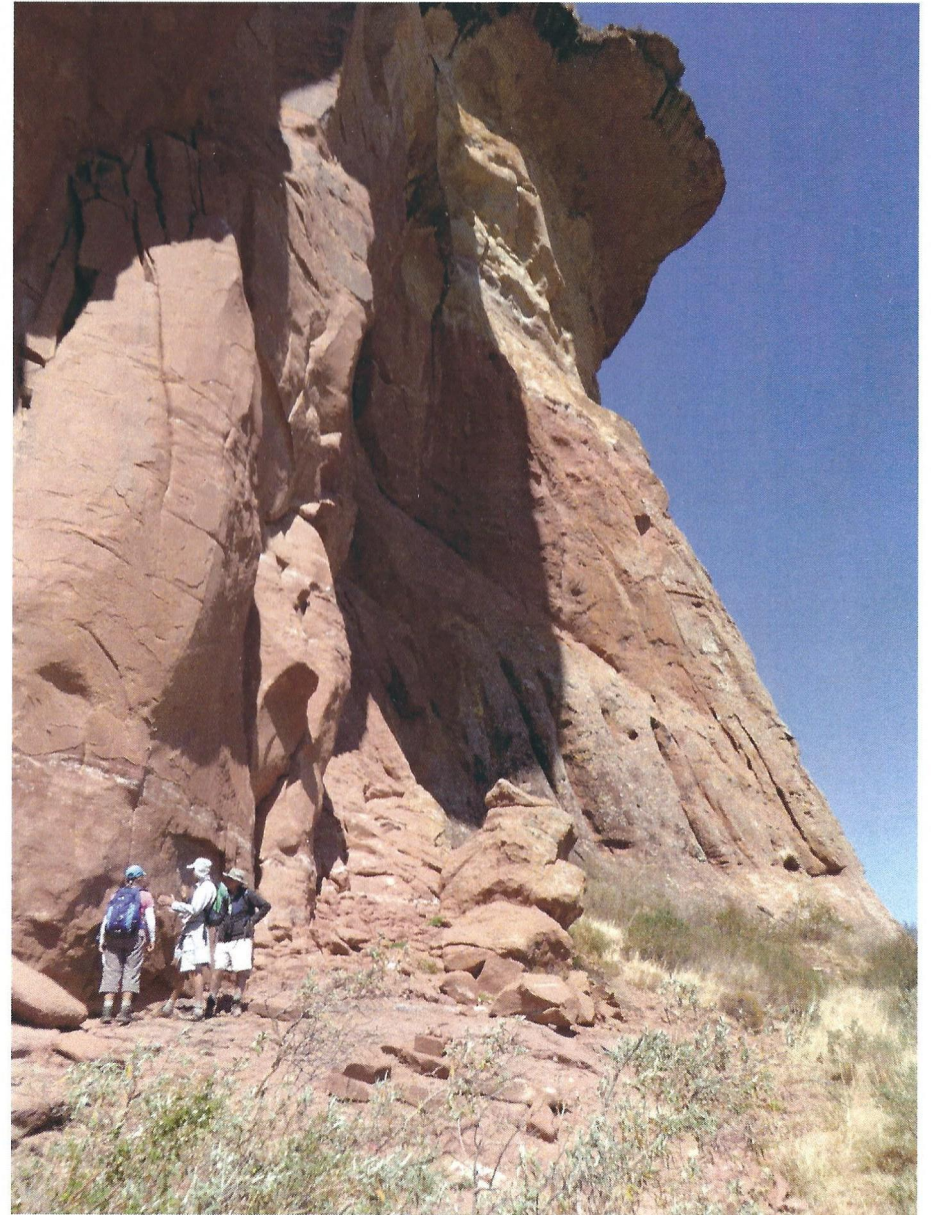


## Mini METHS meet in the Golden Gate Highlands

14-18 November, 2015







Richard: long legs that long for the wild

Yvonne: great sense of fun

Martin: sure-footed

John: explains what he sees as a physicist

Mike: our leader in prized shorts

Verena: gentle but persevering walker

Tich: resilience of long-term, long-ago runner

## Mini Meths Meet

in the Golden Gate Highlands

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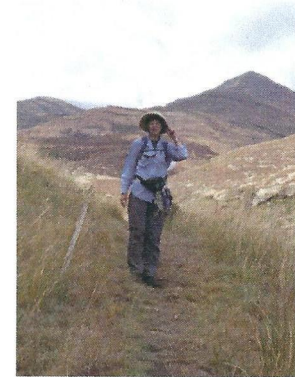
### Getting there:

An Historic Spa in the Karoo  
(Matjiesfontein)

Karoo Treasure  
(Karoo National Park)

Why Ever Not  
(History of Prior Range Farm)

Annette's Tea Garden  
(Late lunch in Senekal)



Miriam, author and  
possessor of large hat

### Three Days Walking in the Golden Gate Highlands

The Twitchers  
(Richard and John, Chalet in Golden Gate National Park)

Mind the Pegs  
(Bradweg Buttress)

This way or That?  
(Wodehead Ridge)

A Rough Climb to Paradise  
(second half of Ribbok trail)





Above is the post office, still functioning as it did in Lord Logan's day. To the left is the Coffee House garden with the pepper trees in the background. Across the street you would find the railway and a museum in the railway station.

## A SPA IN THE KARO

*(Matjiesfontein and the Coffee House for lunch)*

In the midst  
Of endlessly dry scrub  
A lone spring  
Inspired railway man, Lord Logan  
To build where only Koi-San  
Had come to collect reeds;  
And so Logan called it  
Matjiesfontein.

No water now in his swimming pool,  
No more cricket games,  
But a cluster of buildings  
Still offer the visitor  
A museum's memorabilia,  
A Coffee House with pepper trees  
And a grand menu at the Lord Milner Hotel.

*(Lord Logan had his pool built in 1897 and he laid a cricket pitch in 1889. The then Princess Elizabeth visited with her father, George VI in 1947.)*





## KAROO TREASURE

*(Karoo National Park, featuring game drives and a fossil trail with the casts of fossils going back to 300-180 million years ago.)*

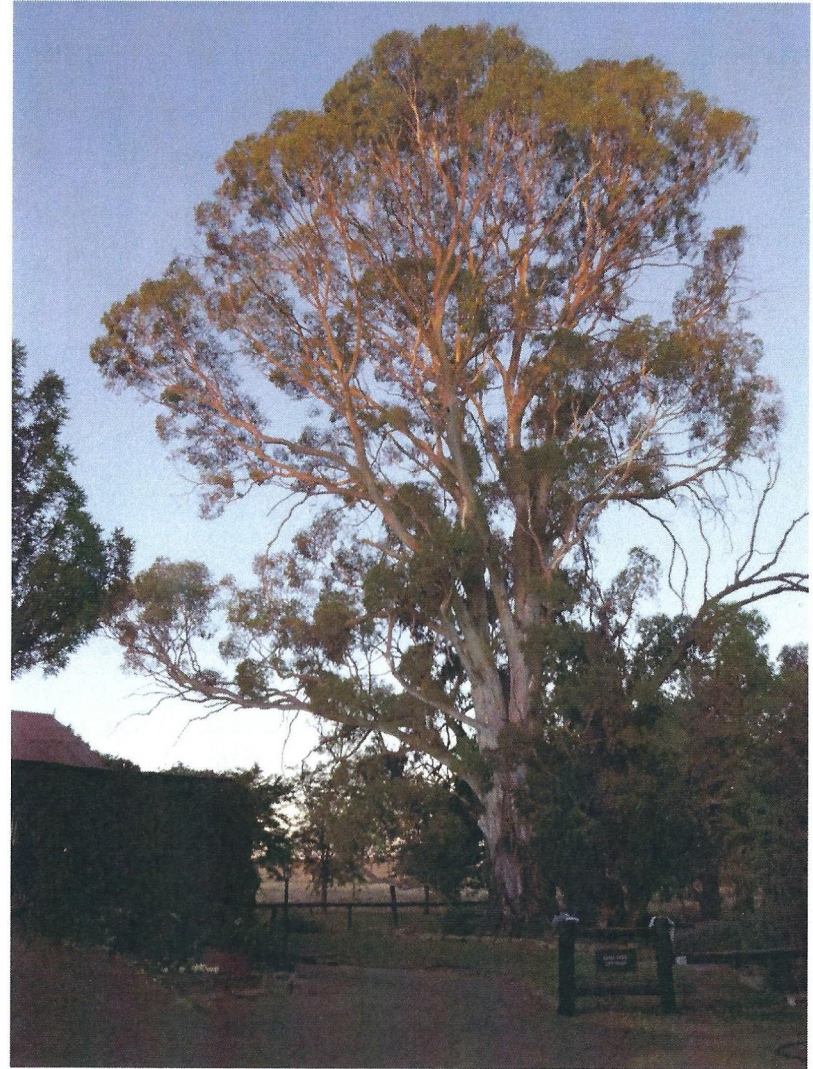
Both kinds of zebra  
Just at the park gate;  
Friendly service from  
The alert Koi-San waiter;  
A cosy new cottage  
With a bonanza of birds to watch.

An expanse of old rocks  
With the bush in spring green-  
Even Robusta acacia;  
Amazing fossils casts well explained;  
Yet nothing of the Koi-San who first found them.

This immense basin of  
Golden grass up to blue-shadowed mountains.  
Always such space  
In which to contemplate...

*(The Permian period was before the dinosaurs and included Therapsids or mammal like reptiles, our evolutionary ancestors. They had massive jaws but very small brains.)*





Above is the 'ghost gum' at Prior Grange.  
To the left is an artist's conception of Permian  
period and a cast of a full Bradysaurus fossil.





*(In 1854, Joshua Prior started the first settlement farm here, 145 kms. south of Bloemfontein. His son, Joshua Prior II built sheds and planted trees, including the now 135 meters high 'ghost gum' tree. The grandson of his sister started the merino stud and their daughter Sheryl married Blackie. Together they run Prior Grange cottages and a sheep farm. Their son, Stephen takes care of the cricket pitch near our cottage and we saw him marking the field for a match with Middelburg which the Prior Grange team won.)*

WHY EVER NOT!

*(Willow Cottage on Prior Grange Farm, near the railway and just south of Springfontein.*

With mountain spring water here,  
A view of the blue hills,  
Supplies from a new railway line,  
Why not bargain with a Grigua chief  
On starting a farm?

With a good bore hole,  
And water table  
Within root-reach,  
Why not plant a ghost gum  
Some willow trees, oaks and poplars?

With merinos elsewhere,  
Building supplies available,  
Why not start a stud  
And develop these sheds  
Into comfortable cottages?

With ruins of a block house,  
Plans for the historic "Rice" type,  
Why not make the perfect place  
To examine the 963 days  
Of Anglo-Boer fighting here?



*Stephen marking the cricket pitch*



ANNETTE

*(A late lunch in Senekal)*

"I'll ask my wife..."

All smiles, Annette shakes our hands:

"You are very welcome."

Cool water, hot tea,

Toasted sandwiches

With extra egg from her hens

For good measure.

Strawberry muffins

For two greedy ones.

"Come and see my carp:"

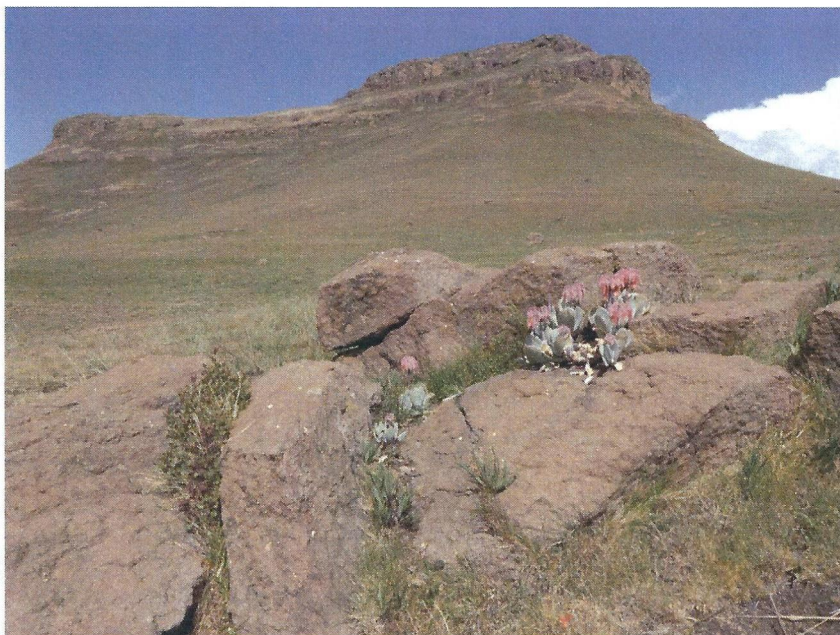
A flash of bright orange

Cheers us on our dusty way.



*Blue flowers which we saw climbing Bradwaag buttress*

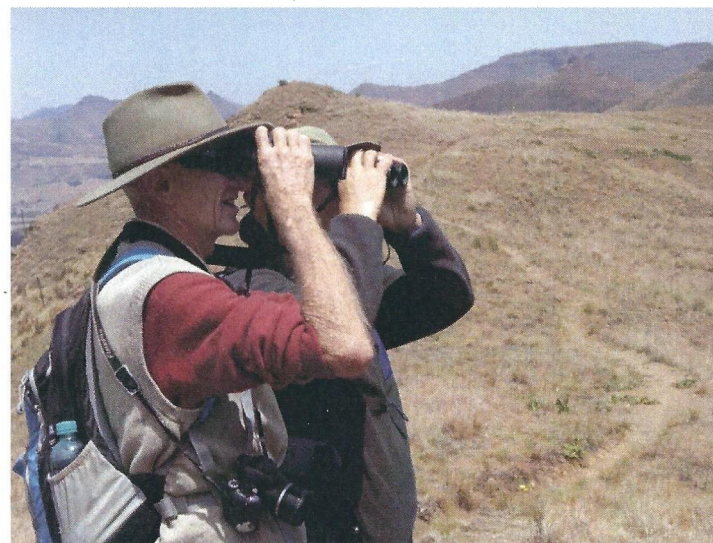




## THE TWITCHERS

*(Richard and John outside our chalet 52,  
in Golden Gate Highlands National Park.)*

Binocs on noses,  
Statues as they gaze,  
Rapt in watching this  
'Rare' bird: "Never seen it..."  
Must be Ground Woodpecker,  
But there it is now,



*Richard and John on way up Wodehead.  
Facing page: view from Bradwag and one  
of John with Generaleskop and Ribbok in distance,  
shadow of Wodehead ridge on them.*





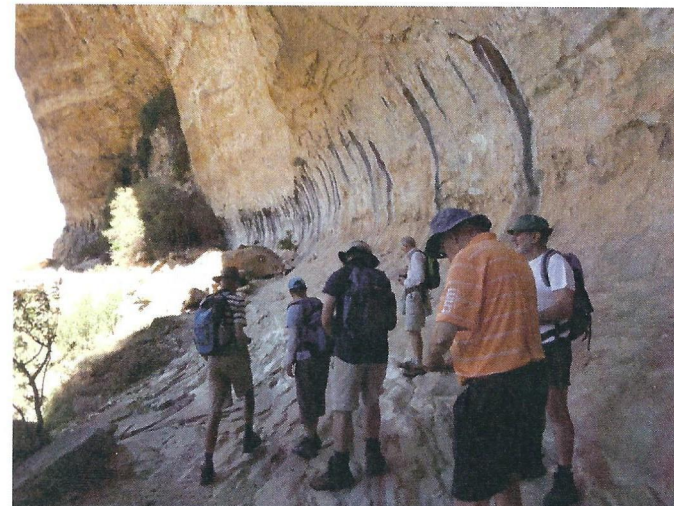
*Stone plant colonies, Wodehead Ridge*

## MIND THE PEGS

*(Ascent of Bradwag Buttress)*

"It's only a short walk  
Up the buttress there,  
But you must keep hold  
Of that chain as you climb,  
And mind all the iron pegs  
As you go down."

This we duly did;  
Yet our start under willow trees  
The catch-up talk, some blue flowers,  
A rest in the shadow of the buttress  
Lengthened a short walk until it was  
Time for tea and Elevens' at the Petzolds'







THIS WAY OR THAT?

*(Up Wodehead ridge, 12 kms and 2436 meters)*

Could be a scramble

With a mean wind today...

Soon though, we're clambering

Towards our ridge

Where stone plants grow

In huge round colonies,

And our path flattens to slipp'y pumice granules.

Could be the top here

With John's GPS reading...

Soon, though, we drop down

To cross huge stomping grounds

Of blesbok, or is it wildebeest?

Then onto the mushroom's top

While the wind makes kites of walkers.

Could we find a

Better descent over there?

Soon, though, we are clinging to grass

Along steep steps of the marked trail

Down to the maroon shale

At the sandstone mushroom's base.

There we plan a bolognaise supper.

*(Martin has since been corrected on Malmsbury shale which does not occur so far inland.)*





## A ROUGH CLIMB TO PARADISE

*(The second half of the Ribbok trail, 19.3 kms. and  
a plateau of 2570 meters)*

"Where's today's walk?"

A dry stream bed

With hartebeest nearby

Beckons seven walkers

Up the Ribbok valley.

Tall grasses and taller reeds

Rustle gently,

Collared widow birds fly overhead,

Four convivial Ground

Woodpeckers all stop on a stone.

"Look up, there's the General."

We're crossing patches of squelchy bog,

Nearby wild roses bravely bloom.

A large Ouhout offers us shade.

Park horses graze with

One bandy-legged foal.

The Ribbok stream emerges high up

From a scum-ringed pool.

*On facing page: Verena marches up Ribbok trail; John and  
Verena under Ouhout tree*





"Must we climb some more?"  
 On we plod up the relentlessly  
 Steep ravine to find, suddenly,  
 Purple and white Scilla,  
 Their bulbs feeding the porcupines who  
 Kindly left a quill for Richard's hat.  
 We think of singing some opera.  
 Yellow celandines abound.

"That big cairn is now a bit closer."  
 Eventually we each find a stone to  
 Solemnly add to its height.  
 Our peak? Oh, no, there's  
 More to climb, and more still...  
 Until we reach a golden  
 Highland plateau, with views all around  
 Of Lesotho and other blue mountains.  
 Watching the group of zebras  
 Peacefully graze just below Generaleskop,  
 We know that we've reached Paradise.

"How must we make it back down again?"  
 The blasts of wind and bullets of rain  
 Now push us along to the khombe and  
 Mike who is told, "We climbed to Paradise."

*On facing page: Scilla cluster of flowers with orange  
 beetle; hartebeest near beginning of walk*



