

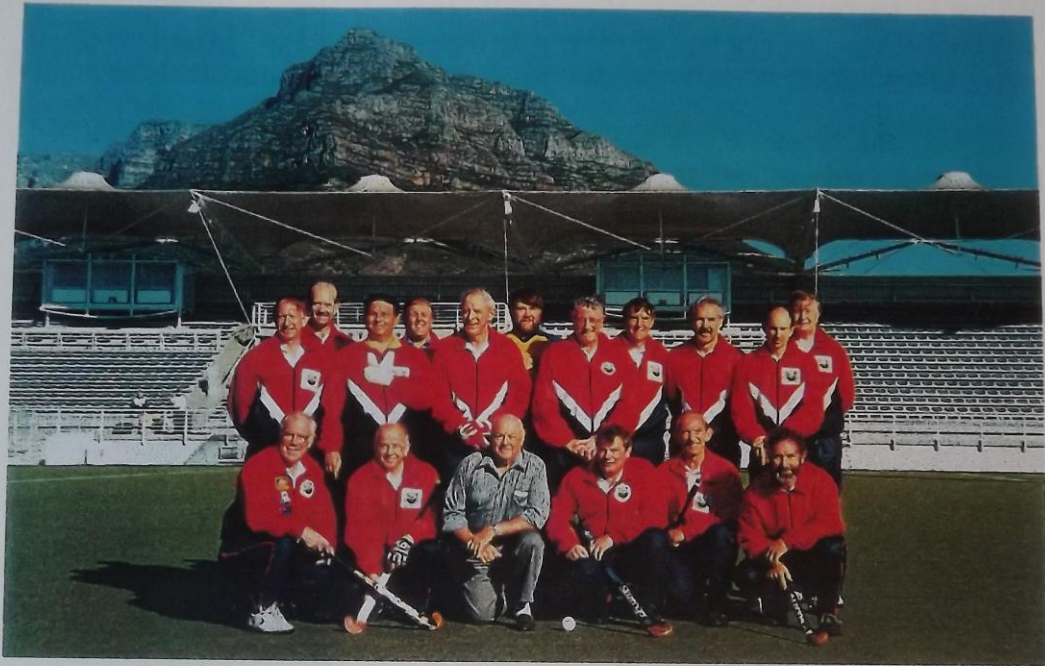
The Ancient Britons



Hockey Tour to South Africa

8th – 31st May 1997

ANCIENT BRITONS



SOUTH AFRICA
1997



Inset Left: Mike Greenhough

Inset Right: Julia Greenhough

Tour Party, taken at the national Stadium, Newlands, Capetown. See end of report for same pictures with names.

Thursday 8th May 1997

ABs descended upon Heathrow from all points of the compass; Hazel, bright and bubbly as usual, had arrived first and welcomed Tom, Beryl, Clive and Steve who were next to arrive. Steve then took over Reception duties (bravely without a beer!) and arriving ABs disappeared in various directions in search of refreshment or the last minute purchase. Tom ordered a sandwich which he was still waiting for some two hours later when the flight was called. It was only now that the full party got together arriving from various distilleries and perfumeries along the way.

Everyone settled in to South African Airways flight 235 for the 11 hour journey to Johannesburg; the food and the service were good, even the film wasn't too bad; and most managed to get a few hours' sleep. Someone had remembered that it was Joan's birthday and a cake had been bought for the occasion – to be presented during the flight. However, in spite of the bottle of champagne donated by the airline, it was presented with little ceremony and no candles and both cake and champagne made it to Johannesburg untouched. The cake was eventually started during the drive to Casa do Sol the following Tuesday and the champagne lasted until Capetown!!

Friday 9th May 1997

We arrived early in Johannesburg at 7.30 am on a beautiful autumn morning. After we had successfully negotiated immigration, the volunteer minibuses and car drivers went off to complete the necessary formalities and to collect the vehicles. Good news!! – the drivers managed to locate the car and the four minibuses (or 'combis' as we discover they are called out here) which appear to be in excellent condition; bad news! – they are on the wrong floor level. Having got passengers, luggage and bearers on the same level as the vehicles and the drivers, the intricate task of fitting everyone and everything in was undertaken with varying degrees of success. In the 'Polibus' are John, Arthur, Brenda, Strapper, Keith, Clive and Roger; in the 'Supervan' – it has 5 gears and is full of 'virgins' (i.e. those on their first tour) are Tom, Beryl, Chris, Frankie, Bernard and Marlene; in the 'Skipper's Bus' are Paul, Betty, Peter, Val, Joan, Sue and Hazel; in the 'Bottle Battle Bus' are Mike (Bottle – **Trevor and Bradders tried to explain to the rest of the party that Mike's nickname had nothing to do with his drinking habits but came from "Ten green bottles hanging on a wall, and if one green bottle should accidentally fall ..."** –but, as someone pointed out, surely this did relate to his drinking habits), Julia, Chris (Bradders), Gaynor, Trevor and Angela ; and in the 'Car' are Steve, Alan and Nick. The luggage in the Bottle Battle Bus had been packed in such a way (by the men!) that as Mike accelerated out of the airport and hit an unseen bump, the cases hurtled forward almost decapitating Angela and Gaynor who

happened to be sitting in the back seat. Subsequent cries of "CASES!!" could be heard every time their bus braked or went over a bump.

The drivers used the hour's journey to the Mount Grace Hotel near Magaliesburg to get acquainted with the combis and the local roads which would be travelled frequently over the next few days. Although only one bus took the scenic route, everyone seemed pleased with their first impressions of South Africa. The Hotel was located at the end of a long narrow track and consisted of many small cottage style rooms, beautifully furnished and all with thatched roofs. As we had arrived early, the rooms were not yet ready for us so we sat in the delightful gardens sampling a 'Castle' (**– South Africa's version of a bottle of pale ale**) or two and a spot of light lunch. Some of the more energetic ABs decided to investigate the 'cross walk'. This was the route which had been chosen by the Skipper for our first and probably last training session of the tour which Beryl later described: "3.30 pm brought the team talk and acclimatisation to altitude trek up the mountain and back, firmly led by Paul (with binoculars to boot!). The red rocky paths led upwards and roundwards, stopping here and there to view the terrain, the Hotel and the now bright blue, sunny and almost cloudless sky. Puffing and panting our merry way through the tall (as me!) elephant grass. It seemed the right thing to do to return via a rather difficult, pretty riverside walkway concluding in the Hotel car park".

Once we had recovered from the acclimatisation, the 'Castles' and, for some, the cream teas, we donned our best attire ready for the formal evening dinner to which we had invited our 'hosts' in Johannesburg – Max Hamber of the Wanderers Club and Clyde Lok and Colin Dowson of KHOSAS (Krugersdorp High School Old Boys Association) who were accompanied by their wives, Lauren and Helen. There was a reunion for some ABs since Clyde and Colin had joined us on the last tour to Barbados. Unfortunately, Julia was unable to join us – a respiratory infection had been affected by the air conditioning on the plane and the dry atmosphere at altitude – and was confined to barracks, coughing and wheezing.

The Hotel had laid on a super buffet – a wonderful array of starters followed by steak and kidney pie or chicken casserole in red wine; the puddings were a hit with Steve who went up first and last! Informal speeches followed. Some then retired to bed to catch up on lost sleep, others decided the best policy was to keep going and retired to the bar.

Saturday 10th May 1997

After discovering 'jungle' omelettes at breakfast (you name it – it was in it!), everyone went their various ways to discover the locality. Some went into nearby Magaliesburg – a one horse town which provided some opportunity for purchasing necessities and mementos but not much else other than observing the locals pouring through town packed into minibuses very low on

back axles, hooting and waving flags. Apparently these were football supporters on their way to the big local derby.

The crew on Peter's bus decided to move on to Krugersdorp, his navigating committee agreeing that directions in the southern hemisphere are the wrong way round. However, this didn't prevent Strapper and Keith from finding two drinking houses on the way.

The Polibus headed for the local gliding Club – said to be the largest amateur gliding Club in the world – and were given free run of the Clubhouse while preparations were made for their flights. Jacko, Paul, Betty, John and Arthur all had half-hour flights – an exhilarating experience, climbing to about 8,000 feet – whilst Brenda, preferring terra firma, watched and took photos. In spite of two aircraft 'tugs', Betty didn't take off until 1.30 pm which meant a prompt departure on her landing and a mad dash to the Wanderers ground for our first match, scheduled for 3.45 pm.

Julia had not responded to 'home' treatment, so Steve offered to drive her and Mike to the Medical Centre in Krugersdorp before departing for the game. Meanwhile, the Supervan decided to follow Bradders driving the Bottle Battle bus until they discovered they were heading down the N14 in the wrong direction. The subsequent re-route took them past a 20ft inflatable parrot ('Poli-inflatable unbearded').

Julia's visit to the Medical Centre had been longer than expected – involving X-rays and an antibiotic drip – so Steve, having put his foot down most of the way, arrived at the ground with Mike somewhat stressed and expecting the game to already be under way only to find that the previous game was still being played and that they were in plenty of time for the pre-match warm up and formalities.

The 1st match v Wanderers at the Wanderers Club, Johannesburg

After the presentation of AB tour pins to our opponents and the exchange of pennants which would be customary throughout the tour, ABs made an encouraging start with Steve, Mike and Paul combining well in midfield to create several opportunities for the forwards.

Unfortunately our first touch in front of goal lacked control and the opportunities weren't converted into goals – was this the effect of playing on an unnatural surface (grass!)?

The Wanderers were very quick to pick up on any AB mistakes and looked dangerous in attack. The defence coped quite well until first Trevor and then Bradders allowed a couple of innocuous shots to escape their outstretched sticks (they later claimed that the effect of

altitude made it difficult to get their sticks on the ground!). Wanderers then added a well-constructed goal and we went into half-time 3-0 down.

In the second half we were more successful in containing the Wanderers forwards, who were limited to a handful of shots on target, all of which were dealt with competently by Keith who was having a very sound game in goal. The only shot to get past him was from a short corner which struck Chris a painful blow well above backboard height and was, after some discussion, disallowed.

We, however, created hardly any scoring opportunities at the other end until a late flurry of short and long corners – but all to no avail.

The Skipper used this game to give the whole squad some time on the pitch. The consequent changing of players, and occasionally positions, probably didn't help the team performance on this occasion but would hopefully stand us in good stead for the ensuing games.

Result: ABs 0 Wanderers 3

Post-match hospitality was excellent in the spacious facilities at the Wanderers Club where, we were informed; there are plans to build two hotels within the Club grounds. After consuming ale and plates of chips we reluctantly left the Wanderers at about 8.00 pm and headed for the 'Waterfront', one of Johannesburg's main tourist attractions constructed around an artificial lake – there can't be many waterfronts at such high altitude and so far from the coast! Plenty of bars, restaurants and shops and a variety of entertainment, including bungee jumping from a crane high above the lake – some were momentarily tempted but thought better of it with three weeks still to go on the tour! We eventually descended upon McGinty's Irish Pub where some remained for draught beer and good food – others went in search of steak bars or seafood restaurants, all of which were excellent value with the exchange rate being so good.

Now came the most difficult exercise of the evening – finding our way back out of Johannesburg onto the right route to Mount Grace. This was achieved with varying amounts of success and a variety of different routes, the longest being attributed to the Car which eventually returned to the Hotel some hours after leaving the Waterfront, much to the consternation of Paul who had arrived back much earlier and was now in a 'muck sweat' on the car park waiting for Betty.

Sunday 11th May 1997

Two busloads headed for Gold Reef City, south west of Johannesburg, which was reached in spite of the lack of signposts. Two ABs were old enough to get in for half price! The city was more of a theme park than anticipated but the Crown Mine (an old working gold mine) was well worth the visit, giving an insight into how hard life was in the early 1900s, with hammer and chisel to dig out the mine to 3,000 metres depth. It was not difficult to appreciate the appalling conditions in which men worked, with dust and noise of drills and explosions of dynamite. Back on the surface there was a variety of entertainment to enjoy, particularly the native African dancers; also the gold extraction process and the minting of coins.

Two other buses headed for the gliding Club but with less success than the previous day's group. Because of the long queues Tom, Chris and Frankie returned to Mount Grace for a day of sunshine and bowls. Bradders, Clive, Trevor and Angela, having been lured by the smell of bacon into the Officers' Mess were confronted by an Irishman who enquired "Are you the group for tomorrow?" Ignoring this bit of Irish logic, his lady companion said "I'll Guide you to the runway – follow me on my bike". Bradders foolishly handed the keys to Sq. Leader 'Biggles' Davies to handle the difficult off-road section of the parking exercise, who then proceeded to lap the airfield twice, narrowly missing the tail of a glider and finally coming to rest in the doorway of the air traffic control tower (a black and yellow garden shed on wheels!). This confirmed the initial suspicion that Sq. Leader 'Biggles' was not the man for driving job anywhere in South Africa.



"I don't care if Bottle and Bradders won't let me drive the bus!"

Angela, Clive and Trevor managed to get airborne but by then it was time to return for today's match and Bradders was dragged from the airfield screaming "It's not fair!"

The 2nd match v Clyde Lok's X1 (SHINS) at Randburg (Astro)

Paul had worked out that this was ABs' centenary – i.e. our 100th game. Unfortunately, due to the pitch being overwatered and a misunderstanding of the captain's tactics, our usual 'high speed' game was reduced to a pace that allowed the opposition to exploit our shortcomings and we again came second, although we did show glimpses of our potential.

Under pressure from the start, we lacked cohesion but, in the 10th minute, a break down the right and a good cross saw Nick shoot narrowly wide. At the other end, Keith made a great save from a one on one situation and SHINS missed a good opportunity before they scored from a short corner. Another nearly followed but for a great stop on the line by Chris. Nick opened up midfield to provide an opportunity for Clive who narrowly missed. SHINS then scored a second; following a solo run down the left which evaded numerous tackles. We then had a spell of pressure before half-time which went unrewarded.

The second half saw further good attempts on goal by Steve, Nick and John but we were still unable to open our account for the tour. Increasing SHINS pressure brought further good saves from Keith and one on the line from Arthur. Sterling work by Paul and Jacko helped the beleaguered defence but they were unable to prevent two further SHINS' goals.

Result: ABs 0 SHINS 4

Post-match hospitality took the form of a Braai (barbecue) and reached a high spot with the ABs' choral rendition of the Woad Song. SHINS Umpire gave an eloquent oration of welcome – reminding ABs of Rorke's Drift and suggesting that the English got 'stuffed' there as well! Roger (ABs' own real 'French Fry') responded and mentioned, inter alia, the incident of certain touring Ladies and an ice-cream cone!

Eventually we saw the opposition off and left – Tom almost putting his rear end in juxtaposition with an opposition member's vehicle – and this time managed to go straight home, only slightly led astray by Peter's affection for a local oil refinery. Bradders did a hand brake turn and left Peter in quiet contemplation of his situation. On returning to base camp, coffee was plundered around the lounge fire and the assembled company was spellbound by the amazing repertoire

and razor wit of the 'Bradders and Davo' tour road show. Bacardi and coke in the coffee cups eventually superseded the coffee and everyone retired in a mood of great benevolence.

Monday 12th May 1997

SUN CITY INVADED BY TRIBE OF ANCIENT BRITONS

Having consumed the mandatory 'jungle omelette', the Polibus, the Skipper's Bus and the Car set off fully laden for Sun City for a day of sun, swimming, gambling and golf (for some). The Supervan decided to have a rest in the shade of the Mount Grace car park whilst its inhabitants spent the day bowling, resting, paddling, dreaming and eating bananas, apples and cream teas. With Julia still not well, Mike elected to miss the Sun City Golf Classic – although when he heard stories later that the rough consisted of 2ft high elephant grass infested with alligators and puff adders, he was not too disappointed. He set off in the bus to take Julia for a further 'inspection' at the Krugersdorp Medical Centre leaving the rest of their crew 'bottle-stopped' once again. At approximately 1.00 pm the 'Medicine Bottles' returned and, after a hasty bus conference, decided to rest at Mount Grace whilst the others headed into Sun City. Meanwhile, the advanced party, having turned the wrong way out of the drive in spite of the combined efforts of two navigators, had recognised and rectified their error and had arrived at Sun City, collected their 'Sunbucks' and set off to explore; a palace straight out of 'Sleeping Beauty', casinos and 'pokies' (– **Australian for one armed bandit**) as in Las Vegas and an amusement park like Chessington Park of Adventures. Like a film set, it was fake through and through but good fun for a day out. Paul, Betty, Roger and John went to the artificial beach to enjoy the wave machines and water slides and were later joined by Peter, Val, Sue and Hazel. By now the Midlands contingent and Clive had arrived after an eventful journey which had seen a great debate over what type of fuel to put in the bus and Bradders doing soixante-neuf mph in third gear with his head out of the window because of what appeared to be ostrich droppings on the windscreen, thus failing to hear the screaming from the gearbox and pleas from the occupants for the 'Silence of the Cams'! The two groups met up at 5.00 pm on the Bridge of Time for the experience of a lifetime – a knee trembling earthquake. Disappointment engulfed them; they had seen more excitement at an ABs game (which has a similar effect on the knees!). Paul, Betty, John, Steve and Keith stayed for a meal and a spot of gambling, Keith making a modest profit, whilst the others returned by different scenic routes to Mount Grace to enjoy a marvellous dinner in the delightful surroundings of the Hotel restaurant.

Tuesday 13th May 1997

Sadly we said our farewells to Mount Grace and set off in an easterly direction for our next destination, Hazyview, where the Casa do Sol would be our next home for the next three nights

and the base camp for the Safari section of the tour, being situated half an hour's drive from the Kruger National Park.

The long straight roads of the N1 and N4 made for a relatively easy, though long, journey. A distinct lack of 'loo' stops necessitated a detour for the crew of the Polibus into the town of Witbank where a kind lady in the deli section of a supermarket made sandwiches while they made use of the staff toilets to satisfy their other needs. Witbank was also honoured by a visit from the Skipper's bus; Betty rang home on the mobile phone and the clarity of her conversation with 'mum' was remarkable.

The scenic route to Hazyview via Long Tom's Pass was well worth the effort with fantastic views in the late afternoon sunlight. On arrival at our destination we were greeted by our hostess at the Casa do Sol with a cool drink while the combis got their own greeting with a wash down.

The Bottle Battle Bus had delayed departure from Mount Grace whilst Bradders did his best to drive away the remainder of the residents by telling awful jokes and Trevor took on the task of removing more ostrich droppings from the windscreen. Eventually they departed, with Bottle at the wheel, on the scenic route to Pretoria, encountering road signs which had very thoughtfully been put up to indicate which route the rest of the party had taken.



The Bottle Battle Bus crew finds South African road signs most helpful in determining which way the rest of the tour party went

Having established that 'Brits' was actually a town, they decided to head for Pretoria for a sightseeing and lunch stop. They continued their journey later than anticipated with Mike offering to do a second stint of driving. Thankfully the driver stayed awake unlike the navigator (Bradders) who, weary of the long, straight roads, was snoring profusely. Darkness fell, petrol gauge hovering on '0', the sound of Africa permeating from the front passenger seat and echoing across the night sky. A petrol station loomed on the horizon – a difficult decision; 'P' first or 'BP' first – 'P' first, definitely! Mike offered to continue driving rather than risk Bradders night sight – only 15 miles to go according to the navigator (or was it kilometres). Next signpost 'Hazyview 45km' – "Oh shit!" said the driver (most unlike Bottle). The turn off to Casa do Sol was eventually located to the delight of the driver and the navigator (who was in need of a shave and hose down) and to the great relief of Strapper who had taken on the mantle of Guardian Angel.

Everyone could now move from the bar to the restaurant where the waiters were unusually attired in smocks and berets. Trevor, relieved to have arrived and getting rather merry, decided to join an adjacent table of Bostonians and teach them English. Later, in Chiquita's Bar, Lynn (reputedly the resident pianist) was tickling the ivories. Trevor, now very merry, tried to chat her up but failed miserably and decided to lead the communal singing – inviting Betty and Marlene to join in – in any appropriate key that came to mind.

Mike was seen disappearing to bed mumbling to himself "Only 35km to go!"

Wednesday 14th May 1997

The next two days were mainly devoted to Safari – of the self-drive variety in the Kruger National Park, the evening escorted variety on the Mthethomushwa Nature Reserve or the walking / horse riding variety around the Hotel's private reserve.

Today all vehicles spent some part of the day in the Kruger and encountered a wide variety of animals. The Polibus, an early starter with John at the helm and Steve as Guide took the road towards Lower Sabie spotting impala, a giraffe and a large group of hippos on the way. Steve, an old hand at the safari business, was anxious to get onto dirt roads and they were lucky to get a good view of three leopards, came across a buffalo by the side of the road at the Lower Sabie dam and almost lost Jacko overboard trying to get a picture of a submerged hippo. After a lunch stop, where the lengthy queue did not deter Steve and Keith from trying the pie and chips whilst the others were satisfied with drinks, they journeyed on towards Crocodile Bridge where they spotted two lionesses deep in the shade. Back on the dirt roads, warthogs, ostriches and various mongooses were encountered before probably the best sightings, particularly for the photographers, first of a large, well-endowed, bull elephant which came out of the bush and passed within a few yards of the bus which kept John in gear with the engine

running in case a swift departure was called for, and then a herd of buffalo on the move. By now running out of time, the drive to reach the gate before the 5.30 closure of the park was hindered by baboons and guinea fowl taking to the roads, causing traffic problems and one local casualty (a guinea fowl). Two brief stops to allow Jacko to photograph a wonderful sunset and the gate was reached at 5.35. A fine was avoided, but by how much no one knew since there were several vehicles behind including the Bottle Battle Bus.

Back at the Casa do Sol, tales were swapped of favourite sightings and interesting encounters; the still lingering thrill of that first sighting through the undergrowth of female kudus, the blue balls of the vervet monkeys, a zebra crossing and a road hog; it transpired that virtually every animal in the park had been seen by someone. There was even a report from the Bottle Battle Bus that they had spotted that rare bird, the Curd's Bustard – so named because of its distinctive yellow colour!

Bradders had been issued with a stern warning from the Park Police for exceeding the park's 50kph speed limit and promised not to break the speed ever again. This he kept, even in the panic of trying to reach the park gate before closing time and swore that it wasn't him who flattened the guinea fowl! (Why did the guinea fowl cross the road? – To become decimalised!).

Thursday 15th May 1997

John, Paul and Betty set out even earlier today to discover what could be seen in the park at dawn. This proved to be well worthwhile with numerous sightings including a hyena finishing his breakfast of some poor animal's leg (a later check thankfully found all ABs intact). An added bonus was the Casa do Sol packed breakfast which kept them going through lunch and tea.

The rest of the party relaxed around the pool, explored the gardens or ventured into the Hotel's private game reserve on foot or on horseback. A grand challenge tennis match took place between, representing the Midlands, Trevor and Bradders and, representing the South, Jacko and Nick; the Davies' secret service and the Bradder's sliced backhand won the day ("we don't know what *we* are doing so there's a good chance the opposition won't either").

At 1.15 pm two combis turned up to take the evening safari group to the Bongani Mountain Lodge on the Mthethomushwa Nature Reserve (don't ask me how to pronounce it, it's bad enough trying to type it!).

After one hour at high speed down dirt tracks with one driver, Matthew, regaling everyone with tales of how many vehicles he had written off, the qualities of our regular drivers were greatly appreciated. Passing through an African village where barefooted children shouted their

greetings to us, we eventually reached the gate to the nature reserve where we transferred into two large, four-wheel drive Land rovers with tiered seats. The drive up to the Lodge was worth the trip on its own with superb views over the mountainous countryside. On arrival at the Bongani Mountain Lodge, which was reached via steps that had originally led to a Hindu temple, we took tea (a good selection of beverages and 'cookies') on the balcony overlooking the valley and the mountains beyond.

At 4.00 pm we set off on our evening safari, the drivers (Neelse and Victor) with their rifles handy and the trackers (Neelse's tracker was Zephrum) perched on a sort of 'dickie' seat on the front of the bonnet. With strict instructions not to stand up until told to, we sat back and enjoyed the nature around us, learning about the flora and fauna as we went. We had been told not to expect too much in encountering game but we had good sightings of impala, zebra, giraffe and a beautiful nyala hiding in the bush just off the track. As the light faded, so did the hopes of seeing a big cat although it was fascinating to watch the tracker picking up tracks – "a lion a day or so ago" – "a leopard earlier today". Darkness fell and the trees took on the shape of animals; Zephrum turned on the search light and Neelse stopped the vehicle, ran twenty yards to a tree and came back with a lime-green chameleon which turned to dark green as we held it.

The drivers were in radio contact in case of any sightings and we received a call to say that rhino had been spotted near the picnic area. This was the signal for a bit of 'off the road' driving, everyone hanging on tightly as the Landrovers leaped over boulders and flattened small trees which sprang up again when we had passed. Suddenly, picked up in the search light close by, there was a family of white rhino – a mother with two offspring. They didn't hang round for very long and we drove back down to the main track and stopped nearby where we got out of the vehicle and drank wine or beer and ate dried sausage and crisps. It was a wonderful feeling to be out in the open under a beautifully clear starlit African sky in close proximity to all those animals, albeit within easy reach of the vehicle and with a rifle close at hand. The night air was now quite cold and we headed back to the Lodge, the tracker sweeping the area with the searchlight and spotting eyes in the distance, another chameleon, a bush baby, tiny birds asleep on a branch and a klipspringer high up on a rock.

Back at the Lodge we made our way to the boma (a protective enclosure) where, in the warm glow of a camp fire, we enjoyed a wonderful meal, wine and local African beer.

Our drive back down to the gate was halted by a large water buffalo strolling along the road. While waiting for it to move out of our way, we were all startled by the loud trumpeting of an elephant very close by. Zephrum, now driving, was loathe to stop but was no match for the persuasive powers of a bus load of ABs and soon picked up in the search light, several female

elephants with their young. They were obviously not at all pleased with this intrusion and Zephrum soon continued his journey to the gate where we transferred back to the combis and sped back through a now rainy night to the Casa do Sol, arriving just before midnight tired but very satisfied.

Friday 16th May 1997

After an early breakfast, we reluctantly said our farewells to the Casa do Sol and set out for our next destination in the Natal Drakensburg Park, a journey that passed close to several battle grounds, including Ladysmith and Rorke's Drift and proved longer than anyone expected.

The Bottle Battle Bus, having missed the scenic route on the way in, went via Long Tom's Pass where they examined the balls of his cannon and purchased some carved animals.

Sue was not her usual bright and bubbly self today so the Skipper's bus had to make an unscheduled brandy stop at the 'Whistle and Trout' in Waterval Boven. Whilst Sue was revived, Paul went to investigate the local railway museum and sidings – this town being at the junction of the high and low veld where additional 'engine power' was required. Talking of which, the Skipper's bus had now developed 'Bradders disease'; with fourth gear acting more like overdrive, there were several occasions when the driver would be content with third gear unaware of the screaming engine due to internal chatter, road noise and the engine being at the rear. Consequently, a code word was adopted – 'Richard' – indicating the need to change 'Gere'!

Meanwhile the Bottle Battle Bus had reached Breyten where a 'comfort stop' was required. Julia's trained eye spotted the Breyten Hotel up a side street. This turned out to be the original Bates' Motel from 'Psycho'. Bradders was sent to do a recce but could get no reply to his knock on the door. A local standing in the doorway of the Bank opposite suggested he rang the bell which brought about the appearance of 'Mrs Bates', accompanied by a wizened old retainer, who beckoned us through the 'ballroom' to the lounge where drinks and a very different angel cake was served. It was noted that the wizened retainer had the name of the Hotel embroidered on the back of her 'overall' – perhaps this was in case she got lost and had to be posted back!

Eventually all arrived safely at the Drakensburg Sun Hotel. At least one vehicle and all ABs were low on fuel, the latter being amply satisfied at the bar and the extensive buffet in the Hotel's restaurant.

Saturday 17th May 1997

A morning match versus Old Collegians at Pietermaritzburg did not mean any cooler weather. In fact, this was probably the hottest day so far. The ABs squad had now been augmented by

the arrival of the Colonel (Tony Hall) joining us from Australia via his croquet commitments in Canada.

The 3rd match v Old Collegians at Pietermaritzburg (Grass)

The earlier start obviously suited us and there was some sharp play from both teams in the early stages. A goal from Old Collegians after 5 minutes was followed by a period of pressure during which Jacko and Nick worked hard to assist the defence and made a couple of crucial clearances. Jacko then combined with Bernard to create an opportunity for Clive who equalised. A further period of OC's pressure was relieved first by a couple of clearances from Trevor and then a good save from Keith. At the other end, a long pass found Clive in space and he narrowly missed putting us in front. It was OCs who took the lead, however, which they extended twice before half-time to lead 4-1.

We found ourselves 5-1 down within 5 minutes of the restart and, in spite of some good work by Jacko which created another opportunity for Clive and some sterling work in defence by Arthur, this soon became 6-1. Good interplay between Nick, Steve and Jacko took the attack to the OCs and Clive made it 6-2. This and a much needed water break seemed to revive our spirits and with Bernard, Clive and Steve going close there was an exciting finish to a well fought half.

Result: ABs 2 OLD COLLEGIANS 6

We were entertained afterwards to a Braai by the very sociable OCs, particularly Des Mayne, an attorney, whose singing qualities as a tenor matched the qualities of his stickwork which had earlier been a significant factor in OCs' victory. Trevor and Angela had their palms read by Neville Markham – Angela was told a few home truths about Trev and their divorce is now in abeyance!!

We then returned to the Drakensburg Sun in time to see Chelsea win the FA Cup. Betty's difficulty in seeing as she drove directly into the setting sun prompted some interesting deliberations as to where the sun actually set in the Southern and Northern hemispheres.

Sunday 18th May 1997

On a sunny day beneath a clear blue sky, six intrepid ABs (Joan, Hazel, Jim, Roger, Clive and John) set forth to discover the realities of the notable battles fought in the area. First stop

Ladysmith where they discovered reminders of the Boer War; several buildings that stood at the end of the 19th Century and artillery pieces used in the siege, one of the worst in British army history – 118 days (Roger, as an AB defender, could empathise). On to Dundee and a visit to Talana Hill where they found the graves of the principal British participants who fell in the defence of the town at the Battle of Talana, the first of the Boer War, in 1899. The museum at Talana had an excellent display of memorabilia of the Boer and Zulu wars. They then headed south east along a 20km dirt road to Rorke's Drift – a river crossing ('drift') where the Rorkes had lived. Nothing was left of the buildings that had stood at the time of the battle when 130 British troops defended the crossing from 4,000 Zulus but a fine museum contained relics of the battle and detailed the events of 1879. The reality of the battle was brought to mind on the return journey when a party of Zulus decided to take a belated revenge by stoning the bus – a fighting retreat was made to Ladysmith.

The Davieses had breakfasted early and went on a 3 hour conducted hike to see the Bushman's Paintings. Steve, Mike, Bernard, Jacko and Bradders (elegantly attired in check shorts and shirt and odd Bermuda socks matching the check) went off to take on the local 9 hole golf course which included a hair raising journey on a swing bridge across a small 'ravine' to reach the 4th tee after which Steve's legs were almost too wobbly to play his second shot.

The less adventurous ABs spent a relaxing day enjoying the facilities at the Drakensburg Sun. The AB Bowling Club's version of the 'timeless test' continued on the Hotel's green to be interrupted at 10.30 by the arrival of the Colonel, resplendent in his best whites, for the advertised Croquet session on the adjoining lawn. No one else turned up and there were stern words with the Hotel Management who promised a proper arrangement at the 2.00 pm session. The Colonel duly arrived – but was alone again. So he decided to play himself – and only just won! Over on the adjacent Bowling Green, Nick had joined Tom and Chris who were now well on their way to a new World Record by playing from 10.00 am to 4.00 pm without a break. Nick had to retire, however, with sandal sunburn on his feet – Tom was heard to comment that 'youth has no stamina these days'.

Marlene, Betty and Angela braved the cold water of the swimming pool and, as the afternoon light began to fade, a pitch and putt competition got under way during which Paul achieved his famous 'hole in one' – unfortunately he was the one in the hole, not the ball!

A formal dinner had been arranged for the evening and the Colonel was officially welcomed to the Tour. Following dinner, the Ladies retired to the Lounge while the Skipper held a team talk which aimed at producing an improvement in our results. Its most immediate effect, however, was to produce a rather impatient 'Skipper's mate' and the men retired to join the Ladies.

Monday 19th May 1997

Another early start to repack the vehicles and head for the coast and Selborne Country Lodge and Golf Course at Pennington 50km south west of Durban. The Colonel joined the Bottle Battle Bus, which required a major rethink on the packing to incorporate the croquet mallets and the computer. This would be the start of a new experience for the Colonel; he had never been in such proximity to anything like Bradders – even in Australia!

This was not one of the longer journeys. The Skipper's Bus made their usual 'one hour' fuel stop; the smokers leave the vehicle (thankfully away from the petrol station), someone needs some money – a lengthy business in South Africa – so the rest explore the shops. The Bottle Battle Bus returned to the Old Collegians ground en route so that Trevor could pick up that vital piece of every hockey player's equipment, the gum shield holder, which he had left in the changing room after Saturday's game. Yet we still all arrived at Selborne Lodge in time for lunch even though it was a late, and mainly liquid, lunch for some. We all had spacious and elegant accommodation either in the Lodge itself, where the Skipper's rooms were palatial, or in the suites situated in the delightful grounds. The 'virgins' in the Supervan had arrived early, to be welcomed on first name terms by the Hotel staff who offered to prepare a picnic lunch to take to beach where they enjoyed a relaxing afternoon.

On a very warm, humid evening we set off for Durban for the 8.00 pm game against Gongs HC on the excellent Astro at the KwaZulu Natal National Hockey Academy Stadium.

The 4th match v Gongs Fossils at Durban (Astro)

ABs started well, putting the Gongs' defence under pressure but without creating any clear goal scoring opportunities. The game then developed into a midfield battle for a while before Gongs forced a penalty corner which was unconverted but led to a period of pressure on the AB's defence. This was relieved by a good clearance from Peter, a good passing movement between Jacko, Mike and Steve that created a clear chance for Tony.

Gongs took the lead after 17 minutes against the run of play when a rapid attack led to a scramble goal. This was followed by a period of sustained pressure and a second Gongs' goal 7 minutes later. ABs responded well with both Bernard and Clive having good shots, both of which were well saved by the Gongs' goalkeeper. Despite a concerted effort during which a goal was disallowed and several corners were forced, ABs were unable to score.

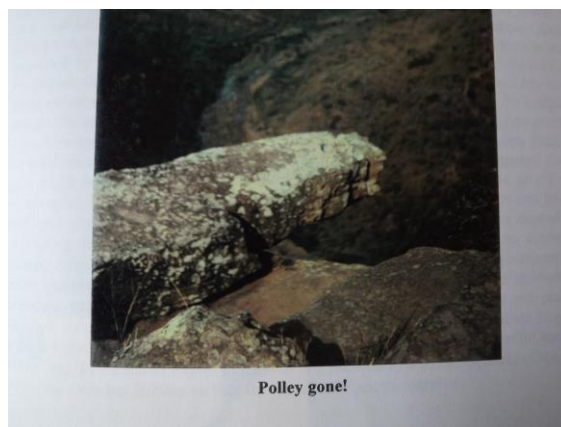
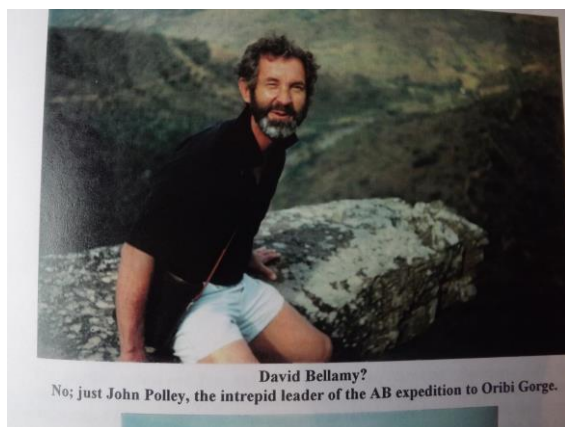
Result: ABs 0 GONGS FOSSILS 2

After the usual post-match hospitality and refreshments a tired party managed to find their way back out of Durban and eventually returned to Selborne Lodge at about midnight for a good night's sleep.

Tuesday 20th May 1997

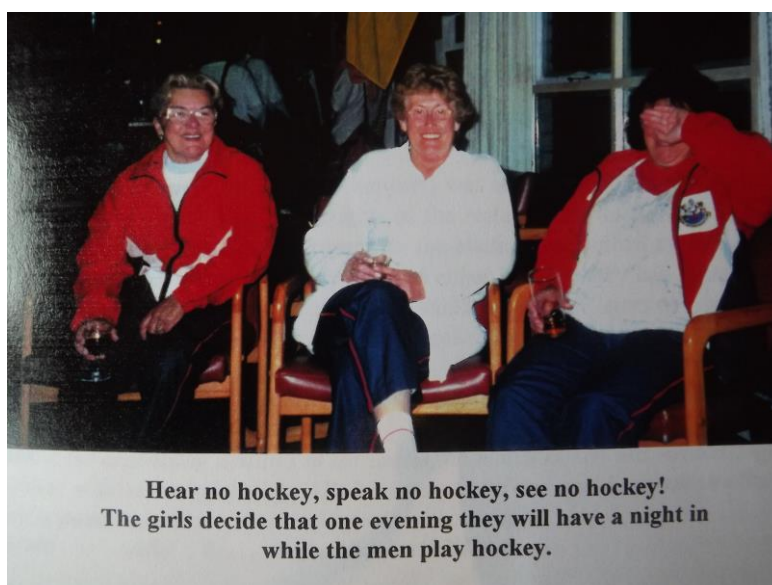
The golfers tackled the beautiful but demanding Selborne course where there was almost as much water as fairway and where, whenever a ball disappeared, a local lad appeared with a bag full of balls for sale. Trevor's progress around the course earned him the nickname of Zig Zag Davies or ZZD for short.

Angela, Julia, Brenda, Arthur, Jim and John visited the Oribi (pronounced as in 'orrible) Gorge, 1,000 ft deep and half a mile wide, near Port Shepstone. John, bearing a striking resemblance to David Bellamy, was in his element.



Roger, preferring a more leisurely pursuit, accompanied his 'harem' to the beach, where they walked and had a picnic lunch by the Indian Ocean. Later in the afternoon Roger finished off the lunchtime sandwiches and poured tea for the Ladies while they tucked into tea and scones.

The Ladies had decided that enough (support) was enough and that, as they hadn't had the opportunity of sampling the delights of the restaurant, a 'Ladies Only' evening was required.



The men meanwhile returned to the stadium in Durban to do battle against Mike Masden's XI which had been selected either because they had mistaken Ancient Britons for Great Britain veterans or to make absolutely sure of victory since it contained five former internationals and several other territorial players.

The 5th match v Mike Masden's XI at Durban (Astro)

Without the organising abilities of the Ladies, no match report was written. Suffice it to say that, without ever giving, ABs were outplayed and could only admire the skills of their opponents as they scored eight goals without reply.

Result: ABs 0 Mike Masden XI 8

Again we were entertained very well with plenty of refreshment and made many new friends. On returning to Selborne we joined the Ladies, who had enjoyed an excellent dinner, and retired to the Bloomfield 'Presidential' suite for a late night cocktail party, our claim of losing 3-2 soon being rumbled.

Wednesday 21st May 1997

The morning broke bright and clear; a beautiful day for the long drive to East London which would take us through the Transkei – a very interesting, though some would say dangerous, journey. We had been advised by one of our opponents last night to ensure that we filled up with fuel before entering the Transkei as we would need a full tank to reach the next 'safe' stop.

Attaching our well laden machines to the N2, we sped along the highway bounded by fields of sugar cane and beautiful forests of pine. As time and miles passed under the wheels it was interesting to note the many changes that took place. As the forests disappeared, cattle, sheep and goats with some agriculture became the most significant farming ventures. Another significant change was the number of schools and very neatly attired schoolchildren that were seen along the way.

Although there were still a large number of poor quality homes, the percentage of better class homes, particularly those with their own cultivated patches, was most evident. Many homes were built on tops of hills and quite a distance from water which we later learned was because people believe spirits dwell in the waters and must not be disturbed. Potholes are a feature of many of the roads in the area – indeed they merit their own permanent sign – 'Slaggai' – but, as we moved into the more densely populated regions they became larger and more frequent. Arthur, driving the Polibus, seemed to have found a way to hit most of them but after a time,

with great manoeuvring skill, managed to avoid most – either way disrupting the usual sleep patterns in the rear.

Some made a scheduled stop in Umtata to refuel both machine and occupants but, shortly afterwards, all had to make an unscheduled stop when we were pulled over by the Police searching vehicles for firearms. After some discussion and assuring the Officer that the only lethal weapons on board were hockey sticks, the Polibus was allowed to proceed. The Bottle Battle Bus was more fortunate; either the military bearing of the Colonel or the sight of Bradders persuading the Police to wave them through.

Now in the Eastern Cape Province, we made our way through the Kei River Pass to the Basil Reid Bridge. The road through the Pass was long and distinctly winding and some of the bends quite hair-raising; several sighs of relief were heard when we eventually descended into East London.

Arriving at the Osner Hotel as instructed, we found that we had been moved to the Kennaway Hotel further along the sea-front; all ABs on the third floor with sea views. We had only a short respite to get over the long journey before it was time to set off for the game against East London Masters at the nearby Astro.

The 6th match v East London Masters X1 at East London (Astro)

ABs took the initiative from the start with a series of good passing movements which led to chances on goal; a good opening created by Steve was eventually cleared; Jacko picked up a clearance, got into the circle and shot wide. The defence had to be alert, however, as the occasional East London attack threatened danger and Paul was called on to make a couple of crucial clearances. One clearance from Arthur found Chris in space down the left but there was insufficient AB support to benefit. Further AB pressure resulted in clear chances which were squandered through inaccurate strikes on goal. Mike ventured forward to create a good position on the edge of the circle which also went unconverted but ABs were eventually rewarded when a promising movement led to Bernard receiving a good pass from John and opening the scoring. Tom was somewhat dramatically (though not seriously) injured, the Colonel showed a clean pair of heels down the right wing and the half came to an end with the AB defence repelling a period of East London pressure.

Half-time oranges came in the form of Amarula (a sort of South African ‘Baileys’). This seemed to do the trick for East London, or was it the effect of the sight of AB defenders with a combination of alcohol and the iridescent socks worn by one of their forwards that allowed him to score the equaliser?

ABs were soon on the attack, however, and so enthusiastically did Steve chase one opportunity that he was ‘bunkered’ disappearing headfirst over the fence at the end of the pitch. In the scramble that ensued the subsequent corner, Bernard followed up to score the winning goal.

Result: ABs 2 East London Masters X1 1

The after match function was superb with plenty to eat and drink, good speeches by the East London captain and Tom and the now customary ‘downing’ challenges. After the Skipper had been photographed making an AB donation to the Border Hockey Supporters Club, we made our lingering and, in some cases, fond farewells; the drivers who had remained sufficiently sober led the way to the vehicles; those who had not, followed and found a seat somewhere or another – ten were reported aboard the Bottle Battle Bus – and we returned to the Hotel.

Thursday 22nd May 1997

Another early start with a long drive to Knysna and a 4.00 pm game. Doubts were expressed as to whether we would arrive in time. Hard driving, brief stops and packed lunches were the order of the day.

Unfortunately for the occupants of the Bottle Battle Bus, a slight fuel leak, which they had been keeping an eye on since Drakensburg, had worsened and a pool of petrol, oil and water had developed under the bus overnight. A democratic vote was taken – should they go on or should they sort out the problem whilst in East London? Common sense prevailed by 4 votes to 3 – one male, more in fear of his other half than of the consequences of the fuel leak, adding his vote to the three females!! A short trip to the Europcar depot at East London airport resulted in an exchange of vehicles. To Bradders’ delight the new bus had a personalised (CB) registration but he now had a new problem – the Chinese 5-speed gear box. As he drove sluggishly out of the airport, Bradders complained that the bus hadn’t got enough ‘oomph’. After Bottle had suggested that 1st gear might be more suitable than 4th, Bradders sped off down the R72 in an effort to catch up on lost time. Unfortunately he failed to spot a road works sign and he was suddenly confronted by a man waving a red flag – his eyes dilated and protruding from his head like organ stops as Bradders bore down on him, eventually coming to

halt some 50 yards beyond the STOP sign, narrowly missing an encounter with a car transporter, a Police car and a heavy lorry – all hooting madly. The incident did, however, prove the efficiency of the Bottle case packing system as not one piece of luggage was disengaged. After an inordinately long 'fast' food stop where Bradders went for the 'monkey gland' burger, the rest of the journey proved uneventful and they drove into the Ashmead Resort in Knysna at 2 minutes to 4 to the applause of the other ABs who were just leaving on foot for the adjacent sports complex.

The 7th match v Southern Cape Wanderers at Knysna

In the late afternoon sunshine and on an uneven grass pitch which made control difficult, ABs again started brightly but suffered a setback when Chris had to go off to Hospital with an injured hand. Play was then evenly balanced with chances at either end; Paul made a vital stop and clearance from a Wanderers' penalty corner; Clive, Jacko and Peter combined in one of the few passing movements but the chance went begging. Wanderers took the lead after 24 minutes when slack defending failed to deal with an attack down the right and the subsequent pass back from the goal-line was firmly struck home. The play was still end to end; Jacko created a couple of chances and Bernard had a good shot saved. The first half ended with ABs on top but still unable to score.

The pattern was similar in the second half with movements from both sides frequently breaking down. Nick came close to scoring; Tom cleared down the wing to Tony who linked with Steve but his cross evaded AB sticks; a break-away by Clive and a cross from Paul was cleared. Hard as they tried, ABs could not find an equaliser and the Wanderers held out.

Result: ABs 0 Southern Cape Wanderers 1

After enjoying a cold beer and a beautiful sunset over the bay, we returned to Ashmead to shower and change ready for the Braai that had been organised for us back at the ground. However, while we were changing, all the light failed. Candles were distributed and used according to taste and an impromptu concert was staged on the balcony – The Three Tenors by Candlelight – featuring Trevor, Clive and Luciano Polleyroti. Trevor performed the dance of the single bath towel – Marlene was seen to be overcome with emotion at this artistic performance. Eventually light was restored, we returned to the ground and were royally entertained by our Hosts to an excellent Braai with no shortage of drink. Chris returned from Hospital, his broken

hand well strapped and in a sling, in time to enjoy the festivities and to make a heart-felt 'thank you' speech.

Friday 23rd May 1997

Three stalwarts – Arthur, Brenda and Nick - were up at dawn to see the sun rise 'over the Heads' at Knysna; really brilliant, with a sudden 10 degree C drop in temperature.

Others rose at a more civilised, but still early hour ready to tackle the last long journey – to Capetown. There was a choice of routes and numerous attractions to visit on the way so it was fortunate that, today, there was no deadline to meet.

The occupants of the Skipper's Bus took a leisurely stroll around the Heads, did some shopping in Knysna and found time for Paul and Peter to take snaps of a train from the 1937-48 period which ran a daily service between Knysna and George, before setting off along the coast road to Wilderness where Sue, Betty and Hazel took to the waters of the Indian Ocean like ducks. After a tasty snack for lunch, the next stop was Dolphins Point where Peter and Paul saw a white dot in the sea - through their binoculars!! They then drove on to Mossel Bay where they did see, even without the aid of binoculars, several dolphins leaping in and out of the sea. They reached Capetown in good time at 7.20 pm after a very enjoyable journey to find the Polibus already 'in situ'.

They had also taken the new super highway past George and dropped in at Mossel Bay where they spotted six seals off the rocks near the Lighthouse. After lunch in Steers at Riversdale they sped on at 90 mph until Brenda, still awake after such an early start to the day, asked for a detour to Greyton so that she could call on 'a relation of an acquaintance'. Twenty minutes on a dirt road into the mountains through totally empty landscape brought them to the picturesque old village of Greyton, nestling under the hills. Here, they were given tea in an old country lodge filled with artefacts of a bygone age. A furious lightning storm broke with rain pounding the roof of the lodge but fortunately a short pause in the downpour enabled them to say their farewells and complete the 90 minute run into Capetown which was an incredible sight at dusk, laid out in front of them as they came over the hill. Keith's faultless navigation got them to the Vineyard Hotel at 6.30 pm.

Anyone enquiring about the destination of the Bottle Battle Bus would have been somewhat surprised since they were headed in totally the opposite direction. The first reason for this was to visit the elephant farm owned by one of the Wanderers' players. Jacko, Steve and Nick in The Car were just leaving as they arrived. After a 'close encounter of the elephant kind' they headed for the second attraction – Plettenburg Bay. Bradders, who had been coughing for a few days, complained more than ever of feeling rough so Julia rubbed 'Vick' on his chest but

this seemed to have little effect – at least on his chest! Plettenburg was certainly a wonderful spot and necessitated a lengthy stay to enable Gaynor to 'take the waters' of the Indian Ocean, Bradders to take some photographs from the sea (he claimed that the topless bathers on the beach were not in his shots!) and full justice to be done to the shops and restaurant of the beautifully situated Beacon Island Hotel.

They left at 1.30 pm and headed for the third and final reason for the detour – the Congo Ostrich Farm near Oudtshoorn where Bradders was intent on riding one of these strange birds. Bottle's chosen route was along the minor roads which would take them through some spectacular country. The Colonel, who was in charge of the map, pointed out that a short section of this route was on an 'unmade' road. After 45 km of bone-rattling driving, often on single track sections and never at more than 60 kph, it dawned on the others that, in Australian and South American terms, this was a 'short section'. It was well worth the effort, however, with some wonderful views as they wound in and out of deep valleys.

They eventually reached the Ostrich Farm at 4.45 pm just as they were closing. Fortunately, the owner was impressed by the Colonel's negotiating skills and they were allowed in to what was a very interesting and entertaining experience. Did you know that 1 ostrich egg is the equivalent of 24 hen eggs? – that the father ostrich, whose feathers are mainly black, sits on the nest at night and the grey plumed mother during the day! – that you can stand on an ostrich egg without breaking it (Trevor was chosen to prove it)! After feeding two very tame ostriches, Linda and Shakey, they went to the demonstration area where Trevor and Bradders were shown how to mount an ostrich and the local jockey, Lester, demonstrated how to ride one. Volunteers were called for and, although somewhat reluctant, Bradders was reminded that this was the prime reason for the lengthy detour and strode purposely to the mounting points. Once comfortable, he was given the advice to "hang onto the wings, grip the side of the bird tightly with your legs, lean back and think of England!" As the bag was whipped from the ostrich's head, the look of sheer desperation on the face of Bradders and the ostrich brought the crowd in the stand to their feet and during the next minute every conceivable facial contortion was expressed by both bird and man. However, Bradders hung on and, when the ostrich gave in, dismounted elegantly to well-deserved applause.

At 6.00 pm, in deteriorating weather conditions and with still 400 km to go they sped on through the Little Karoo towards Capetown. At 9.00 pm and now in need of sustenance, the Colonel spotted a rather smart looking restaurant on the road through Montagu. Fortunately, they had a private room into which the not so smart, rowdy Brits were ushered. The Colonel was congratulated on his choice as they consumed a most delightful dinner enhanced by bottles of the local Cabernet Montagu and by the personality of the serving lady who turned out to be

an ex-provincial hockey player. The Colonel, now fretting over a critical 9.00 am croquet appointment the following morning, contacted base camp and reported location and ETA. The Bottle Battle Bus sped on through the night narrowly avoiding a goat standing in the middle of the N2 and finally descended to the magical and welcome view of the lights of Capetown spread out like a twinkling canvas below, reaching the Hotel at 1.45 am.

Saturday 24th May 1997

A day to recover from all the travelling of the last few days and a chance to get the kit laundered. After their marathon efforts yesterday, Bottle stayed in bed all day and Bradders did not appear until lunchtime. Leisurely activities filled the day – a stroll around the Hotel grounds or the nearby Kirstenbosch Gardens, exploration of the local shops, a visit to the Rhodes Memorial. Some ventured further afield into the city of Capetown and its Waterfront. Barristers, a cosy pub close to the Hotel, was discovered for lunch and for large screen viewing of the British Lions v Eastern Province rugby match (Lions making a better start to their tour than ABs did, winning 39-11). Afterwards, some sat and listened to the excellent South African Army Brass Band and some went later to the IMAX cinema to see "The Plains of Serengeti". The brave (Marlene, Angela and Clive) sample the waters of the Hotel pool.

After dinner, to the accompaniment of a harpist, most retired to bed early to be ready for tomorrow's morning game.

Sunday 25th May 1997

Bottle was still recovering in bed and pronounced himself unfit to play. Julia offered to stay behind to look after him. Everyone else headed for Hartley Vale Stadium and the 10.30 am game against Western Province Masters. This most impressive stadium had been built two years ago for the Olympic qualifying rounds – a superb water based Astro with substantial modern grandstand – just the place for the Official Team and Supporters photo.

The 8th match v Western Provinces Masters (Hartley Vale Stadium, Newlands, Capetown)

The first few minutes were end to end play with ABs slightly on top. A Western Province penalty corner was brilliantly saved by Keith via his face mask and, at the other end, an AB penalty corner resulted in a near miss from John and Clive went close after a fine solo effort. ABs continued to apply the pressure and forced a number of long and penalty corners from one of which Steve stopped well and his shot was brilliantly deflected into the net by Bernard. Clive narrowly missed again with a brave dive before ABs increased their lead

from another short corner when several passes ended in Nick finding the net. A third goal was added before half-time, Nick finding Steve whose cross was converted by Clive.

ABs continued to press for more goals in the second half but it was Western Province who came closest to scoring, forcing a couple of penalty corners, having one effort disallowed and a reverse stick flick nonchalantly saved by Keith. ABs' pressure was eventually rewarded with a further goal from Clive right on the final whistle.

Result: ABs 4 Western Provinces 0

After a beer or two, we were taken to the Newlands Cricket Club, Capetown's Test cricket venue, where our hosts had organised a lunch of fish or steak and chips. It was a marvellous atmosphere and during the presentations and speeches after lunch, Brian Moore, the Western Provinces captain, expressed his surprise at ABs' level of skill and complemented us on the lack of hassle in the way we approached the game. He had earlier flattered the defence in particular in the changing rooms after the game when he had stated, "I knew beforehand how old your defence was but Steve didn't tell me how good they were".

Afterwards Peter drove a group as far as they could go up Table Mountain, then across at Signal Hill (**– so named because a cannon was fired from here to alert people that a ship had arrived with cargo and that they could go and collect it**) – in both cases the views were pretty spectacular – and then down to Camps Bay where they watched the massive Atlantic rollers from the window of 'Blues' restaurant, which was to become a favourite venue over the next few days.

The brave could again be found in the Hotel swimming pool where Angela was challenged to complete a length under water. All fell about laughing when she explained this might be difficult since she couldn't breathe under water. However, it was achieved at the second attempt – and it didn't take lung!! After dinner, in the bar, there were suspicions that Roger was a little inebriated (a slightly stirred Fry!).

Monday 26th May 1997

We awoke to a steady downpour and all seemed to come to the same conclusion that, as it was wet outside, we might as well get wet inside and headed for the vineyards of Stellenbosch and Paarl. Various wineries were visited; some offering guided tours, and a large selection of wines, ports and brandies were sampled. At the Fairview vineyard, cheeses could also be sampled, including goats' milk cheese made from their own herd of goats. Other attractions on the various itineraries included a wool factory, an Arts Museum – where the African art was of a high standard and originality – and a Wine Museum (including even more samples)!

For the occupants of the Skipper's Bus this was not one of the better days. Their first destination – a vineyard at Delaire – had been chosen because of its advertised 'soup by the log fire'. Unfortunately, because of its French connection, there was no food on a Monday. The decision was made to find somewhere else but the misty windscreen confused the driver as to the correct exit route resulting in a 'field trip' through thick slimy mud. Passenger assistance was required to prevent the combi from sliding further into trouble. Unfortunately no pictures were taken of this calamity as the priority was to escape the quagmire and probable wrath of the vineyard owners and because, in any case, the cameras were either without film or batteries. After a tour round Stellenbosch to locate camera batteries, a late lunch was taken and the day took a turn for the better with an excellent visit to the Muratie vineyard whose red wines, port and amber were well appreciated. Because of the earlier delays the next vineyard to be visited had just closed and the decision was made to return to the Hotel before setting out for Camps Bay where an evening meal had been booked at Blues. A very good meal with excellent service – but the disasters of the day were not over. Peter, requiring more cash to pay for the meal and see him through the rest of the week, had his card devoured by the nearby cash machine. Not a good day for Bloomfield brothers!

Tuesday 27th May 1997

Bradders was still not well so the Hotel arranged a doctor's appointment for him. Bradders turned up for the appointment at the Gynaecological Clinic by mistake instead of Dr Black's next door – and we were all later relieved to learn that he wasn't pregnant. As it was still raining, today's exodus was in the general direction of the Cape – Tom had taken the Superbus in that direction yesterday and had found much better weather.

Some took the easterly route via Fish Hoek and Simon's Town, stopping off to see the penguin colony close by, whilst others went via Rhodes Memorial, Table Mountain Cable car park and Signal Hill toilets, where even the toilet rolls were padlocked, before following the west coast, stopping at various points beneath the Twelve Apostles or Chapman's Peak.

The Cape National Park was ruggedly beautiful with its flowers, shrubs and animals which included zebra, antelope and a variety of bird life. Cape Point was well appointed with restaurant, gift shop and a funicular railway which took us up to the Lighthouse and the look-out points, high above the Atlantic breaking on the rocks below. While up there, we bumped into Taff Huxtable and his wife Fiona who were well known to several ABs and who were also on hockey tour, with the RAF Veterans. The Cape of Good Hope itself was not as spectacular but afforded a good photo opportunity before the journey back along the opposite coast in time for the evening game at Pinelands.

The 9th match v Pinelands Masters

at Pinelands (Grass)

The grass pitch was very wet after the rains and the lights seemed rather dim at first but, once the eyes were accustomed, the playing conditions were not too bad. They certainly seemed to suit ABs for, after an even first half which ended at 2-2, they fairly raced away to win by 7-2. The goals were shared between Bernard (3), Peter (2), Clive and Jacko.

Result: ABs 7 Pinelands Masters 2

The match reporter of the day was obviously so mesmerised by the AB performance that the only details in the report were that there was a narrow miss (6 ft) by the Skipper, Clive had a goal disallowed and one penalty corner was 'crap' – which might give a clue to his identity.

The post-match social was superb and 'Man of the Match' Tony made a memorable speech of thanks to our hosts and paid a kind tribute to the achievements of the Ancient Britons on several continents.

Wednesday 28th May 1997

The Polibus was not for the faint hearted this morning as the destination was Table Mountain and the intention was to climb it. Arthur, John, Nick, Roger, Clive, Trevor and Angela duly assembled, Angela already having exercised in the gym and swum 30 lengths of the pool in preparation for this great feat, and were advised by the Hotel tour Guide to take the route via Platteklip Gorge. Arthur, having done this before, is appointed Leader.

They arrived at the mountain base where work was in progress for the new cable car station which would increase the capacity from 10 to 70 persons. They parked and walked through the security checkpoint only to be told that the bus could proceed beyond this point if they wished. Having chosen 'T' shirts to collect on their return (the Lady would be there until 4 pm), they drove on in search of the Platteklip starting point. On running out of tarmac road, they parked the bus, squeezed through locked gates and set out on a hill traverse with spectacular views over Capetown. The only problem was that the path seemed to be going down, not up! Reaching a dead end at a waterfall, they decided to retrace their steps. Encouraged by positive advice from Clive who had stopped to ask the way at a 'Martian Early Warning Post', they set off along a much more defined path. After a further half an hour, the bus loomed into view below them. 'Electronic' Roger, who was carrying sophisticated measuring equipment, informed them that they had walked for 75 minutes, covering 3.5 miles and were now 50 yards higher than when they had started! Retracing their route in the bus, they suddenly came upon a likely looking spot which sure enough turned out to be the start of the Platteklip Gorge Trail.

Arthur rallied the troops, including one who was inclined to mutiny and to retiring to the bar to watch the rugby in comfort and the intrepid seven began their ascent. Over many large boulders and very few plateaux, Arthur played Sherpa and Roger and Angela acted as backstops, Angela encouraging Roger with a bag of fruit sweeties (fortunately, Roger had never been told not to accept sweeties from strange women!). Eventually the summit was reached – Arthur in record time, Roger and Angela half an hour later – and who should they meet there but Taff and Fiona. The views from the top were fantastic – surely the most wonderful aerial view of any city in the world. No refreshments or facilities were open at the top because of the reconstruction work so, having made do with their meagre rations, they made the 2,000 ft descent to the road – an effort of concentration as they leapt from boulder to boulder. Angela's pink trainers were the only casualty – getting soaked through as she took a short cut through a stream – and they arrived back at the bus, tired but exhilarated by the experience and with many memories. Unfortunately it was now turned 4 pm and the 'T' shirt lady had gone home!

Activities for the less adventurous included a visit to the Waterfront to get presents for those back home and a trip to Robben Island to see the 'Mandela' prison and the local penguin population. Paul and Betty stayed at the Hotel poolside to finalise the menu and plans for the formal 'closing' dinner this evening, before joining the others at the Waterfront. This meant that the Skipper's Bus returned from Capetown with eleven on board – almost as many as the local buses! Most managed to get back in time to watch some or all of the British Lions v Border match on TV before changing into best togs for the evening function at Barristers.

We were joined for the final tour dinner by Brian Moore, Chris (the Pom) and Taff and Fiona. An excellent meal, good wine, good company, several prepared and impromptu speeches and presentations and a formal farewell to Tony who would be flying back to 'Oz' tomorrow. A very happy group walked back to the Hotel late at night.



The skipper has everyone enthralled with his explanation of how he obtained the wart hog's tusk.

Thursday 29th May 1997

The last full day to explore the attractions of Capetown and the surrounding areas and also the final match of the tour.

John, Roger, Brenda and Arthur visited the wineries again – this time in Paarl, including a tour round KWV cellars which house the five quarter-million litre vats recorded in the Guinness Book of Records. They say that, after construction of the last vat, sixty invited guests enjoyed a concert by a small orchestra – inside the vat!! They also visited the Afrikaans Language Memorial – a magnificent concrete structure of interesting shapes.

The Skipper's Bus also left in the direction of Paarl to visit the Wiesenhof Wildlife Park. With Paul at the wheel they followed the game reserve manager to the height of 600m where the view all around was magnificent. Having instructed them where to stop to get the best views, the manager left to feed the animals – first six cheetahs then a couple of ostriches, zebras and eland. There were also baboons and guinea fowl in the park and it was nice to see so many protea, South Africa's national flower. They then also found their way to KWV before returning via the Fairview vineyard.

The Supervan did another guided tour of the Cape peninsula visiting Gordon's Bay, Pringle Bay and Betty's Bay and admiring the flora, the fauna and the assorted, colourful housing styles on the way. They also managed to get in some wine tasting at Bot River (it would seem that we have now got to the stage that we can't get through the day without a fix!!).

The Bottle Battle Bus with Clive on board, but without Gaynor who chose to stay behind to 'take the rays' and to spend some money in the local shops, returned to the Waterfront where Clive had the great responsibility of choosing a suitable gift for the Skipper and his wife. This was not an easy task for poor Clive who was getting conflicting advice from his companions but eventually something suitable was purchased and the group trooped off to a Mexican restaurant for a farewell lunch with the Colonel. As time was running short, he then left to get a taxi back to the Hotel to promises from the others of "see you in Australia in 1999" (not knowing at the time that when they returned to the Hotel later the Colonel would still be there, pacing up and down waiting for Steve to take him to the airport).

All roads then led to Fish Hoek for the final match of the tour. In the fading light of the day, the blue-grey mountains rose majestically above the heat haze which lay over the plateau below and the golden ball of the sun sank into the Atlantic Ocean culminating in a glorious sunset (this is a rather more poetic form of the "the drivers found it difficult to see with the sun in their eyes"!).

The 10th (and final) match v Fish Hoek at Fish Hoek (Grass)

The defences were on top for most of the first half and half-time came without either side managing to score.

The second half started with both sides determined to break the deadlock and the early part of the half saw the ABs come close on more than one occasion. Just when it looked as though their greater experience (i.e. we were older than them) would see them through, Fish Hoek broke from their defensive position to score an opportunist goal. This seemed to unsettle the ABs, allowing the opposition to settle back into their game. However, when it seemed that an AB goal was not going to come, Steve took a quick free hit from just outside the circle finding Clive who turned on a sixpence to score. This lifted the ABs into action and within minutes Clive had claimed his second goal. Fish Hoek raised their game again and only determined defence kept them at bay. Once ABs had weathered this onslaught, the game again swung to and fro with both sides creating chances. Fish Hoek increased their determination to save the game but resolute defending and some very good saves and clearances from Keith in goal enabled ABs to end the tour on a high note.

Result: ABs 2 Fish Hoek 1

Back in the Clubhouse a welcoming wood fire was blazing in the grate, the Ladies circling it in ritual fashion. The welcome we received from our hosts was equally warm and we were most impressed by the speed with which the presentation pennant appeared on the Clubhouse wall. The final speeches and presentations of the tour were made. Bernard, whose game had ended prematurely with a cut over his eye, was proclaimed 'Man of the Tour' and 'Tour Hot-Shot' with 7 goals and presented with his awards. The customary drinking challenges were undertaken, including a world record attempt by one of the younger members of the Fish Hoek Club, and a happy group of ABs made their way back to the Hotel, the sound of singing emanating from at least one of the buses.

This happy mood continued back in the bar at the Vineyard where the crew from Sky TV, who were staying at the Hotel in readiness for Saturday's British Lions v Western Province match, led ABs into a rendition of 'Climbing Up The Sunshine Mountain' which ended with everyone standing on chairs, singing loudly.



**“Marlene, I’m plastered again!”
Bernard enjoys the traditional ‘man of the tour’ ceremony.**

Paul and Betty, Trevor and Angela eventually left the bar at 2.40 am having analysed the tour and pronounced it “wonderful”.

Friday 30th May 1997

We have to be out of our rooms by 11.00 am but those who are stationed on the 3rd Floor have been allowed to keep their rooms – everyone else’s luggage is transported up there so that we can enjoy the rest of the day before our late afternoon departure.

It is a day for purchasing any last minute items; Bradders has to accompany Gaynor to look at a ring she spotted yesterday – “serious plastic”, Bradders is heard to mutter. For many it is a final opportunity to investigate the delights of the Cape peninsula. Not surprisingly, Blues restaurant was a popular destination and no fewer than 17 ABs found their way there for lunch (for some this was their fourth visit). What better way to draw the tour to a close than with a glass of Pimms, a seafood salad and a bottle of South African wine on a sun drenched balcony watching the Atlantic waves breaking gently on the golden sands of Camps Bay.

John, Arthur and Brenda found an alternative lunch venue in La Med restaurant at the Glen Country Club which boasts two hockey pitches on the foreshore – a possible venue for our next SA Tour?

Returning to the Hotel, we found Bradders waiting on tenterhooks for a phone call from the jeweller to confirm clearance for the rather large addition to his credit card. This eventually came at 4.30 pm followed five minutes later by the appearance of the jeweller clutching the ring. Buses were loaded, passengers squeezed into the remaining space, and reluctantly we departed for the airport.

At the airport, Angela arranged the ultimate petrol payments and calculated that between us, we had travelled a total of 3,505 miles over the three weeks. Strapper, typically, was engaged in 'rescuing' a single young lady but was thwarted by Val who appeared at his shoulder and asked "Are you all right, Dad?" The flight departed at 6.30 pm and arrived at Heathrow twelve hours later on Saturday 31st May. All bid farewell to fellow ABs, each genuinely sad to be leaving one another, until we met again, which for the majority would be at Dereham for the AGM weekend on 12th / 13th July.

Cast (not necessarily in order of appearance – either at Hotels or on the pitch)

Skipper	Paul Bloomfield	A French Fry	Roger Fry
Skipper's Mate/Kitty Master (Mistress)	Betty Bloomfield	A Bottle	Mike Greenhough
Skipper's Brother	Peter Bloomfield	A Medicine Bottle	Julia Greenhough
Skipper's Brother Mate	Val Bloomfield	Chorus Girls	Hazel Turner
Strapper/Guardian Angel	Jim Harvey		Joan Francis
Goalkeeper/Castle Keeper	Keith House		Sue Harling
Old Man River	Arthur Barber	Vet Vet (a Virgin)	Nick Houchin
Old Lady River	Brenda Wallond	International Virgin	Alan Jackson
Man of the Tour/Tour Hot Shot (a Virgin)	Bernard Sperring	Roy Rogers (a Virgin)	Tom Darlington
Not Quite So Hot Shot/English Tenor	Clive Richardson	Stumpy (a Virgin)	Chris Crump
David Bellamy/Luciano Polleyroti	John Polley	Ostrich Jockey (a Virgin)	Chris Bradbury
Single Bath Towel Dancer/Welsh Tenor	Trevor Davies	Assistant Kitty Master/Ring Master	Gaynor Bradbury
Petrol Attendant/Underwater Swimmer	Angela Davies	Other Virgins	Frankie Crump
Tour Organiser/Tour Guide/Golf Professional	Steve Hattersley		Beryl Darlington
Australian Colonel (retired)/Croquet Professional	Tony Hall		Marlene Sperring



Left to Right:

Back Row: Clive Richardson, Steve Hattersley, Chris Crump, Chris Bradbury, Tony Hall, Keith House, Bernard Sperring, Roger Fry, Alan Jackson, Nick Houchin, Trevor Davies.

Kneeling: Paul Bloomfield (Captain), Tom Darlington, Jim Harvey ('Strapper' - Physio/Masseur/Guru), Peter Bloomfield, Arthur Barber, John Polley.



Left to Right:

Back Row: Beryl Darlington, Gaynor Bradbury.

Middle Row: Marlene Sperring, Brenda Wallond, Joan Francis, Sue Harling, Hazel Turner, Betty Bloomfield.

Front Row: Frankie Crump, Angela Davies, Val Bloomfield.