

Maud woke me at 7am so went for a swim before breakfast in the rock pool-14 lengths-lovely, not cold. Several people around-they seem to rise with the sun. After breakfast we walked along the beach to the main shopping centre at the south end. Wanted fruit but poor selection at Checkers-and dear. Got a newspaper to catch up with events (we have no TV). A pontoon bridge has now been opened over the White Umfolozi, so it should be possible to reach the northern reserves; however we thought we should stay in Margate till over the weekend so booked the flat to the 20th, Monday. Some odd little bits of news in the paper; black council employees had been sacked because they took action to raise their wages to R55 per week (about £30); Jozini Dam has had the sluice gates fully opened to reduce the water level down to about 58% in case there should be further downpours; another cyclone is in the Mozambique channel but is said not to be heading for land. After lunch found a local fruit depot where we bought pineapple, grapefruit, peach and cucumber, then down to the pool again for a swim. A sea fret developed at dusk but later it was a clear moonlight night, and still warm

16/2/84 I developed stomach trouble during the night-some sort of gastritis-and this made me quite weary all day; however in the morning we visited Uvongo about 2kms north of Margate. Nice little beach but no bathing in the sea permitted because the shark nets were defective. Was going to try their rock pool when it threatened rain, so came back to the Manaba pool, only to find it emptied for cleaning-it will be refilled on tonight's high spring tide. Had a brief dip in the sea to revive me. Rested and read in the afternoon. The paper: the Eloff commission has reported on the enquiry into the South African Council of Churches (leading light Bishop Tutu); main findings are that most of its funds come from overseas (a lot from Scandinavian countries), that it has advocated a revolutionary policy towards reform in SA, including disinvestment to create discontent among the poorer sections, that it has sponsored anti-SA propaganda abroad, and that the banning of Bishop Tutu's visits abroad by confiscating his passport has been justified. The World Council of Churches came in for indirect criticism in that some of the funds for SACC were routed through it. Another interesting item is that the African National Congress (ANC), which is communist inspired, may shortly be prevented from using Mozambique as a base for attack on SA because of new negotiations between the two countries. And Attenborough has criticised SABC for its reports on his discussions with Mrs Mandella, Steve Biko's widow, and others; but if there was nothing ulterior is his motives why keep his plans secret, as he tried to? After tea we had a drink in the bar of the Palm Beach Hotel nearby; not exactly a hive of activity but at least we saw some TV. Mind you we were not impressed with this-the news was entirely SA politics ad nauseum, and a programme about the Holy Land was extremely vague and uninformative.

17/2/84 Much better, thank goodness. We walked along the beach and were surprised how high the spring tide had reached; it had swept the sand up and blocked the sea entrance to the lagoon. A bulldozer was working on the problem. Phoned the Natal Parks Board at Pietermaritzburg and were told that the Charters Creek and Mkuze reserves were now opened and accessible, but not Umfolozi. Booked accommodation from the 22nd, hoping that the cyclone Imboa would not come in from the east (still some doubt about this one). Got some money at Standard and our first film.

Pleased that the prints were quite good, as this was the first test of the new Kiron 28-85 lens. Returning we both had a swim in the rock pool, just refilled. Water not yet warmed up by the sun, but nice and refreshing. Met a young Scotsman in the pool (he noticed my ring) who is working in Germiston; he plans to return home in three years time as he doubts the political stability of the place in the long term. Some people, he says, are making sure of selling their houses now and moving into flats (rented) to be liquid when the time comes to go. He himself had been moving house at the time of the Soweto riots and had had great difficulty in selling his property in Capetown; he does not want to risk the experience again. After lunch we sunbathed on the beach at the flats, watching the rising tide breaking closer and closer to the dunes; the caretaker's wife joined us for a while (with her two wire-haired terriers) and said that this season the sea had encroached on the sand more than in the past, and had been generally rougher; she and her husband came here from Rhodesia (as so many seem to have done on this coast) and like it well; the humidity is only a problem in January and February. We also spoke to a young SA woman who said that on the 3pm news the cyclone Imboa was now turning to the Natal coast; the consequent sea swell was lifting the shark nets and was preventing bathing right down to Uvongo. Also there were typhoid cases reported in Durban (apparently there had already been an outbreak in Kwazulu). Which reminds me that along the Manaba beach there is a warning that the water may be infected with Cholera! In the evening went to the Lucien Hotel where there was a singsong going on in the bar, initiated largely by a young fellow called Murphy whose father came from Londonderry, and where we also spoke to a girl from Cork! The hotel manager (Peter Urin) heard us talking about Botswana and came over; he had managed the Marang Motel outside Francistown for a time and is hoping to go back to Botswana when plans to build a new hotel on the banks of the Chobe river near Kasane are fulfilled; at the moment the difficulty is to get an allocation of land from the Government. Now that the road is tarred right up to Kazungula he regards this area as having great potential, the road being, as he put it "the umbilical cord" for Zambia and points north. Any business started now should go a bomb. Also in the bar were a Salady and her Yugoslav husband.

18/2/84 Woke at seven to find the rain teeming down and the wind strong; no wonder that during the night I had half roused to close the balcony door. Did some shopping for food and drink; most of Margate seemed to be doing the same thing. Heard the 11am news on the car radio; Imboa is heading south; Durban promenade was awash at high tide; the temporary Umfolozi causeway has had to be closed because of a rise in the river flow. Thought we'd better hire a TV for the flat to keep track of the weather. The rain and wind got worse in the afternoon; I went for a walk along the shore and got drenched; the high tide had eaten further into the dunes so that there was now a seven or eight foot drop to the surf and it was safer to keep away from the edge in case more fell. The TV news at eight o'clock said that both the pontoon bridge and the railway bridge across the Umfolozi had succumbed to the higher river flow caused by the fresh rains; back to square one! Three Indian women had been drowned at Tongaat beach - they had been swept away by high waves while praying on the shore.

The South Africans seem very pleased with the outcome of talks in Lusaka, hosted by Kenneth Kaunda, to halt military activity in Angola; hopefully SWAPO will be made to tow the line by Angola, but this remains to be seen: at the same time the talks in Maputo may lead to better relationships with Mozambique. All this may equally be just wishful thinking! Went to the Lucien bar for a beer and to hear how the "tube" race had fared in the rough weather. This race is on the river coming down through Oribi Gorge, shooting the rapids to the mouth of the Umzimkulu at Port Shepstone; the competitors use inflated car and tractor tubes and apart from getting to the finishing line the idea seems to be to consume as much beer on the way as possible. The race had taken place but there were some casualties and about nine people had not yet been accounted for. A good movie on TV-about the only decent programme we've seen.

19/2/84 The clouds have lifted and the wind only slight. Quite warm by 9am. Went to the morning service at this time at Manaba Wesleyan Church; informal gospel type meeting with American song books, including, incidentally "Softly and Tenderly". All white congregation except for one youngish man whom I took to be Indian, of striking appearance, who would have been well cast for the lead role in a film about Christ-eyes full of expression. Went to the rock pool for the rest of the morning (sea bathing prohibited). After a walk on the beach went there again in the afternoon; a man of English descent from Capetown said he intended settling at nearby Uvongo-he was waiting for a rented flat because he did not think it wise to put money into bricks and mortar in SA; sooner or later he thinks there will be trouble. In fact he was quite critical of the people here - everything, he says, is dictated by greed. Did packing in the evening in anticipation that we should head north tomorrow, although the news is not good-the Umfolozi pontoon has broken away in fresh floods and it is uncertain when it can be repaired. However, much as our Margate flat is so comfortable, we will go as far as Durban for two nights and be ready to travel to Charters Creek where we are booked on Wednesday; meanwhile we can check the car at Hertz, and stock up with food and drink for the reserves, and perhaps work out an alternative plan in case the Umfolozi is still impassable. Heavy rains and winds associated with Imboa have caused damage round Durban area, particularly at Pinetown. The sea overran the Durban promenade covering it with sand, also demolished the retaining wall and smashed a cafe. However Imboa is now headed south-eastwards out to sea. Another one called Haja has formed near Madagascar but does not pose a threat at the moment. It is the Madagascar meteorologists who name the cyclones because that's where they usually originate, and there is an alphabetical sequence of names to be followed. Until women's lib complained, the cyclones were given girls names!

20/2/84 Pouring down when we had early tea at 6.30am, but it cleared in time for us to load up the car. Some further rain on the 130kms to Durban, but the city was dry. Checked in at the Impala Flats, which are dowdy compared with Margate, but passable and convenient for a night or two. Consulted the AA technical officer about the tachometer. According to him most instruments over record both speed and distance; complete accuracy is impossible so manufacturers tend to protect the motorist by erring on the side of over-recording speed-and as a direct consequence, distance also.



How convenient for the car hirers who charge by the Kilometres on the the instrument! As your speed increases so does the discrepancy between actual and recorded distance. The AA would test the tachometer free if necessary but it was suggested that I first see what concession Hertz were prepared to offer. It took some negotiation with the young manager to achieve results. He had never heard of cars over-recording the mileage, a statement he repeated on challenge; which did not endear him to me since I had to assume that he was lying; all he could do was to exchange the car. What about the excess kms already recorded? He questioned calculations! Eventually he came round to the position that he would credit me with an estimated 15% excess (150 kms) and change the car. Was quite concerned when I deferred a decision on that. Checked again with the AA and on their advice settled with Hertz as offered. The fresh Corolla is an improvement on the last; let's hope the tachometer is. By now it was late afternoon so we were glad to have a beer at the terrace of the Four Seasons Hotel, then go back to the flat to relax. The Umfolozi pontoon has still not been repaired.

21/2/84 Started with rain, which recurred during the day, but never too persistent. Visited Durban's replica of Belfast's City Hall and felt quite at home; it houses a fine wild life museum, which we toured, and an Art Gallery for which we didn't have time. Stocked up with food and drink, in hope, for the Reserves. In between inspected the sea front and were surprised how far the sea had encroached on the promenade, which was still closed to traffic while the sand clearance continued. Native women selling beadwork and leather and basketwork on the front, also Durban's famous colourful rickshaws plying for trade. Had to call again at Hertz to finalise the arrangements; the young manager was positively effusive; I had sensed a softening of attitude yesterday towards the end of our discussions but shall never know whether this has occurred because (a) I had let him off the hook by accepting his offer when I could have got more by being awkward, or (b) he had discovered that I was a tourist from abroad at a rather late stage when filling in the forms, or (c) equally he had found that I was from Northern Ireland and ought to be humoured! Listened carefully to the evening radio and TV news but not a bit about the Umfolozi bridge; plenty of discussion on the talks in Maputo and Lusaka, and about the maize deficit which will cost SA up to a Billion rands in importing meal in the coming year. A day of atonement and of prayer has been called for tomorrow in aid of the drought-stricken areas.

22/2/84 Maud roused and we were having early tea before 6.30am. The heavy cloud has gone and the day is dry. By 8.30 we had checked out our flat and reclaimed the R20 held against breakages etc. Not that the black woman supervisor did more than a perfunctory examination of the inventory; in fact she seemed almost too ready to say everything was in order. Anyway we were quite glad to leave because the flat had seemed stuffier and more decrepit by the hour; and sea bathing is prohibited due to loss of many of the shark nets. So with the sun shining through we set off north up the N2 and by 11.45 had covered the 220kms to the Umfolozi, with a break for coffee at (literally) the only roadside refreshment place in that distance, being the Forest Inn Hotel at Mtunzini about 140 kms out of Durban. Not that the lush green hills

