

# Friends of Iziko South African Museum

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## NEWSLETTER – DECEMBER 2009

As 2009 winds to a close it is encouraging to reflect on a year in which members enjoyed a lecture programme with excellent speakers and diverse topics, as well as interesting outings – some old favourites and some new adventures.

**WELCOME** to Rosemary Smythe who has agreed to be co-opted on to the Friends committee. Rosemary is a long-time member of the Friends and will be well-known to many of you as an enthusiastic participant in our outings over the years. We are extremely pleased to have her on board and look forward to working with her.

**LECTURE PROGRAMME FOR 2010** will begin on Tuesday 23 February. Lectures are held in the TH Barry Lecture Theatre at Iziko South African Museum at 19:00 unless otherwise advertised. There is no charge for members, on presentation of their membership cards with the 2010 sticker; visitors will pay R30.

### Tuesday 23 February 2010

**Speaker:** Dr Joe Tyrrell  
**Topic:** *Charles Darwin*

This presentation will be adapted from the excellent lecture he gave recently to the medical profession. Details to be advised.

### Tuesday 30 March 2010

**Speaker:** Dr: Phillip Cohen

**Topic:** *Snakebite in Southern Africa*

Snakebite in South Africa is poorly taught and consequently poorly dealt with and management is often very confused and haphazard. This results in inappropriate use of antiserum.

Based on 30 years' experience of dealing with snake envenomation in Kwazulu Natal, a simple management protocol has been developed which has easy-to-follow guidelines and should ensure that snakebite victims are properly managed, even by inexperienced personnel. This process will be described with numerous illustrations of snakes and of snakebite victims.

This talk was recently presented to the Congress of Emergency Medicine in Cape Town at the CTICC.

### Tuesday 20 April 2010

**NB: Tuesday 27 April is a public holiday therefore the April lecture has been moved forward one week.**

**Speaker: to be confirmed**

## **OUTINGS IN 2010**

A number of outings, day trips and behind-the-scenes visits are in the planning stage for 2010. Details will be advised well in advance as soon as they become available.

Some of the outings to look forward to in 2010 include the annual fossil-hunting trip with Roger Smith in May, a morning visit to explore the always interesting rock pools at Dalebook, a repeat of the popular Robben Island visit with a geological and historical focus, a repeat visit to the Berg River Dam, Table Mountain hikes, behind-the-scenes visits to different Iziko sites – including the refurbished Social History Centre based in the former National Mutual building on Church Square.

If you have any places of special interest that could be incorporated into the Friends programme in 2010 please let me know. This is your organisation and your ideas and participation in the planning process is much appreciated.

### **REPORTBACK ON BERG RIVER DAM visit by Dan de Langristin**

On Saturday 14 November an interested group of Friends visited the Berg River Dam. We were guided by Fumba from the Department of Water Affairs (DWA) Berg River Dam staff who had been seconded at the last moment due to the unavailability of the appointed person. He did a really good job not having had time to prepare in advance.

We were impressed with the amount of computer technology involved in this modern state-of-the-art installation. One had a vision of many huge valves and pipes with much manual turning of large valve handles to control the flow and direction of water. Quite the opposite! Firstly there appears to be very few people required to run the dam and, secondly, computer touch screens open and close the valves which did not have visible handles.

We went into one of the underground tunnels that directs the water to another destination and learned about the interconnection of several dams that are serviced as required by the availability of and demand for water in various areas of the diverse greater Cape area. All very interesting and sophisticated!

An in-depth archaeological history of the dam basin prior to construction and filling was subject to intensive research by Mary Patrick whose presentation was most interesting particularly to those who did not have any prior archaeological exposure. The large amount of research and detective-type analysis that had to be conducted to establish the archaeological impact of this project was impressive and is of great social, ethnological and historical importance with the time-line of human habitation in this valley going back many thousands of years.

Thanks to committee member Richard Borden for organising this interesting visit.

### **REPORTBACK ON WELLINGTON WINE WALK by Rosemary Smythe**

We began our walk in the Bain's Kloof Pass starting with a steep descent down the Kromriver Valley to the recently restored Doolhof Estate. Our guide, Ron Lloyd, gave an interesting historical account of the area and the construction of the Pass. While listening to him we were able to marvel at the beautiful mountain landscape and to try to imagine the difficulties of moving around the area years ago.

The winemaker at Doolhof gave an interesting talk about their wines. The treatment of the barrels and the different techniques used to achieve special flavours was particularly interesting.

We continued through the valley, with the river running alongside to Welvanplas, which dates back to 1704 and has been in the Retief family since. Yes, Voortrekker Piet Retief is in the lineage and lived on the farm until the age of 28. It just breathed history and we enjoyed a talk by the present

farmer, Dan Retief Jnr, which included showing us interesting old family photo albums. The wines were interesting, but not as much as the family!

It was really hot as we zig-zagged our way through and across vineyards and orange groves to the Bovelei Valley Retreat. What a welcome sight it was. We collapsed gratefully in the shade of a long veranda facing a very inviting pool and we enjoyed a delicious lunch. This is definitely a place to return to.

Then it was off in the blazing heat to our last stop of the day at Leliefontein where we met the Bosman family, now the fifth generation, learned something of their history and tasted some of their wines. A much-appreciated air-conditioned bus took us back to Bakkies B & B to relax after our 12 km walk before an evening braai.

On Sunday we drove to Diemersfontein and walked up steep slopes through vineyards enjoying the stunning views all around. We learned about the vine 'stokkies' industry, Wellington supplies 82 to 85 per cent of all 'stokkies' to the industry.

At Die Boskombuis every inch of the land seems to be utilised in some way by the du Plessis family. Elsabe du Plessis, an energetic and inspirational woman told us about the many family projects that make the most of all the seasons. Buchu is made into oils, perfumes, food, medicinal concoctions. Pinotage and Shiraz jams are made from the best grapes. Green and black olives, wines and other fresh produce are marketed in different ways.

We walked back to Diemersfontein through vineyards and magnificent scenery for more wine tasting followed by a very convivial lunch before heading home.

Definitely an outing to be repeated but in cooler conditions! The history alone was worth the hard walking.

## **REPORTBACK ON HUGUENOT TUNNEL repeat visit by Robin Gilfillan**

It is pretty certain that most of us have travelled through the Huguenot Tunnel, between Paarl and Worcester, and I imagine that we've all experienced the tunnel as a world-class shortcut through a massive mountain barrier. Friends of the Iziko South African Museum are usually curious about the scientific underpinnings of what we see and experience. This is why 20 of us recently paid the tunnel a visit on a hot December morning.

The Huguenot Tunnel was officially opened in 1988. The 3.89 km tunnel has a parallel tunnel running alongside. I was intrigued when we entered this dimly-lit tunnel with its natural temperature of about 17 degrees ('perfect for wine storage' our guide explained.) For it to become operational, this second tunnel requires only concrete cladding, a tar road and electrical fittings. The increased traffic flow, especially of heavy vehicles, necessitates its being commissioned in about four years' time. This will result in two parallel uni-directional carriageways.

David Gray gave us many interesting facts and statistics, but I was struck especially by his explanation of the human eye's 20-second delay in adjusting to the darkness of the tunnel, after experiencing daylight. Taken at a speed of 90 km, this means that we require 350 metres of bright lights from each end of the tunnel. The middle section of the tunnel has dimmer illumination.

The high-tech machinery, jet-engine-sized fans, computers, back-up equipment and nerve-centre control room, are all housed in bunker-like concrete rooms. Our guide explained that this construction, built 30 years ago, was designed to withstand 'internal terrorism attacks'. A James Bond movie director would probably enjoy using these facilities as a movie set – bunkers, high-tech equipment, dials and flashing lights. All he might require is a megalomaniac who stored nuclear weapons inside the tunnel!

Many thanks to Richard Borden for leading this interesting trip.

**THANK YOU** to the hard-working committee who have worked tirelessly to put together the programme for 2009, often encountering some serious frustrations when planning outings. Munro and Richard particularly deserve 'perseverance medals' in this respect. We were sad to say farewell to John Taylor and Melissa Stander whose contribution to the committee and the Friends was valuable and much appreciated. We recently co-opted Trevor Wilkins and Rosemary Smythe on to the committee and look forward to working with them as they add their talents and considerable energy to the team.

**WHITE LIONS OF SANBONA:** The final lecture for 2009 by Andrew Schofield was an excellent presentation enjoyed by a capacity audience. The DVD of this fascinating programme to introduce the specific gene back into the wild is available for purchase from the distributors: Next Video, Telephone: 011 880 7030 or Fax 011 880 4587 at a cost of R120.

### **WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR**

This popular annual exhibition of internationally award-winning wildlife photography has recently opened at Iziko South African Museum. Take time during the holidays to enjoy these extraordinary photographs.

**STRENGTHS & CONVICTIONS:** The life and times of the South African Nobel Peace Prize Laureates Albert Luthuli, Desmond Tutu, FW de Klerk and Nelson Mandela feature in this exhibition that weaves together a collection of portrait photographs, contemporary works of art and short documentary films into a rich historic tapestry of the laureates' lives. It is a unique way of communicating South Africa's tumultuous history and its transition from an apartheid state to a multi-party democracy, and helps us to understand the role South Africa's four laureates played in their country's historical narrative.

The exhibition is at the South African National Gallery, Government Avenue, Cape Town.

**SUBSCRIPTION RENEWALS:** Renewal notices and forms were sent out to all members on 13 November and Jill has been kept busy ever since with the flood of renewals – THANK YOU VERY MUCH. I have included a renewal form with this newsletter in case yours has been mislaid. Remember that your 2009 subscription comes to an end on 31 December, unless you are one of the members who took out a three-year subscription or someone who only joined after 1 October this year in which case your membership is valid until 31 December 2010. Remember that in order to make full use of your membership benefits your card will only be valid from 1 January if it has the 2010 sticker attached.

**BIODIVERSITY WEBSITE:** A website which members might find interesting is Iziko's Biodiversity Explorer website which features the biodiversity encountered in southern Africa, from viruses through to mammals. There are over 5 000 pages and 4 000 images on the site. It has grown steadily in popularity and currently each day an average of about 3 100 pages are downloaded by 1 290 different people. Have a look at it and discover more about this fascinating country in which we live. <http://www.biodiversityexplorer.org>

**SUBTLE THRESHOLDS: The representational taxonomies of disease**  
Iziko South African Museum until March 2010

This excellent exhibition by artist, Fritha Langerman, aims to draw attention to some of the contemporary debates surrounding biomedical visual and material culture. Drawing on the collections of the Iziko South African Museum, the University of Cape Town, the Wits Adler Museum, and including new works by the artist, the exhibition is primarily concerned with the visual representation of disease.

Situated in the gallery between the social history and natural history displays, the exhibition aims to create a conceptual bridge between the two areas within the museum by presenting a complex visual network of the inter-relationships between zoological, human and microbial worlds. In doing

so, *Subtle Thresholds* seeks to expose some of the cultural and historical mythologies that have contributed to the perception of disease as a state of otherness and separation.

**ELECTRONIC TRANSFERS:** I continue to receive unidentified deposits in the Friends bank account. If you do not receive your 2010 membership sticker please let me know when you made your deposit. It is important that when making an electronic transfer or depositing directly into the bank account that your name and the word 'subscription', or relevant activity, is clearly stated and that you forward a copy of the transaction by fax, e-mail or post to the Friends office so we can trace your deposit.

**OFFICE HOURS:** The Friends office at the Iziko South African Museum will be closed from 18 December and reopen on 13 January 2010.

**THANK YOU TO YOU THE MEMBERS** for your continued support and enthusiasm in 2009. Even in these uncertain economic times you still flocked to lectures and filled the outings. It is also very encouraging to see the membership grow each month. The newest and youngest member is Noah Bloch (guess whose grandson!) who turns two on 20 December and has already been visiting the museum with his Grandpa for a year.

**HAPPY HOLIDAYS:** The committee join with me in wishing you all a happy and safe holiday and we look forward to seeing you all again in 2010.

**WELCOME TO ALL NEW MEMBERS.**

It is a pleasure to welcome the following new members who have recently joined the Friends – we look forward to meeting you at our future activities

Clem Druker  
Gabriela Eibenberger

Evelyn Holtzhausen  
Sheena Kaal

Erik Kiderlen

*Maxine Davies*  
*Editor – Newsletter*  
*Friends of Iziko South African Museum*