



Newsletter: August 2008

What happened at our last meeting held on 10 July 2008

Henry Hartley opened the meeting in the absence of Pres. Paul Otterman (who is recovering after having broken a leg) with a special welcome to invited guests, Dr van Heerden, Dennis McCann and Jimel Balt.

Apologies were received from Spyker vd Vyver, Paul Swart, Harry Munro, Mannie Winterbach, Clive Poulton, Klaus Ehgartner, Terence Conroy, Tony Gibb

Henry told us that Hospice had requested that Probus appoint someone to serve on their committee. As Henry is already on Hospice Committee, it was decided that he will also represent Probus.

John Pennefather gave us an interesting talk on the Heliograph and for good measure had brought two instruments along to show us how they were operated.

From the earliest times some form of communication has been necessary in war. During the battles between the Greeks and the Persians a polished shield was used which in effect was a crude heliograph. This type of signalling device was used by the Athenians to convey a message from Athens to Marathon in 480 BC.

The prototype of the heliograph was the heliotrope which was invented by Karl Gauss, the German mathematician and scientist, in 1821. This is the first recorded example of an instrument being used to transmit a signal by way of sunlight. This is best described as follows

“in essence it comprised two mirrors fixed at right angles to each other, one being silvered and the other unsilvered. The operator looked through the unsilvered mirror at the distant station and turned the pair of mirrors so as to superimpose the relatively faint image of the sun reflected from the plain surface of the unsilvered mirror onto the distant station. This automatically directed the beam reflected from the plain mirror onto the distant station”.

In 1860 the heliostat was converted for use for Morse signalling by the insertion of a shutter between the mirror and the distant station.

It was during the wars in India that the heliostat was improved and became known as the heliograph, where it was used effectively during the various campaigns, as well as during the Second Afghan War.

By the end of February 1879 heliograph was used under active service conditions during the Zulu War.

The Jameson Raiders carried a heliograph, as part of their signalling equipment, on their disastrous venture which culminated with the surrender to the Boers at Krugersdorp in January 1896. The heliograph was kept by the Boers and used by the Signallers of the Boer Army during the South African War of 1899-1902. This heliograph was found after the war and can be seen in the Royal Signals Museum.

During the South African War visual signalling continued to be used as a means of communication by Boers and British. It is generally accepted that heliograph signalling reached its peak during this period, when speeds of up to 16 words per minute were attained.

During the First Great War of 1914-1918 the heliograph was also used by the two opposing forces. It was used in Mesopotamia where the vital oil installations between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers were to be protected. It is also recorded that a heliograph station was set up on the Great Pyramid in Egypt, giving a considerable advantage for communicating distance in that relatively flat area. It was also used in Palestine, Salonica and on the Western Front.

The longest fully documented distance for a 5 inch heliograph in a post First World War period is 96 miles. This was achieved in 1935 by a South African Artillery detachment on survey duty in the Tuli Block of Botswana. The stations were at Massamnekop in Botswana and Pilanesberg in the Transvaal.

Heliograph training was carried out in the Western Desert in 1940 and the last recorded use of the heliograph under active service conditions was in 1941 at the siege of Sollum Hayata during the desert campaign of the 8th Army.

Dieter Kruger suitably thanked John for an interesting presentation.

Next Meeting

Date: **14 August 2008**
 Time: **9.30 for 10.00**
 Venue: **Methodist Church Hall in Brink Street**
 Speaker **Jak van den Bergh**
 Will be doing a presentation which promises to be very interesting

Birthdays and Anniversaries for August 2008

4 August	Harry Munro	13 August	Clive Poulton
22 August	Annette Meyer		
12 August	Ed and Lois Farnworth	15 August	Peter and Stephanie Graven

One Liners

1. Regular naps prevent old age... especially if you take them while driving.
2. Having one child makes you a parent; having two makes you a referee.
3. Marriage is a relationship in which one person is always right and the other is the husband!
4. They said we should all pay our tax with a smile. I tried- but they wanted cash.
5. A child's greatest period of growth is the month after you've purchased new school uniforms.
6. Don't feel bad. A lot of people have no talent.
7. Don't marry the person you want to live with, marry the one you cannot live without... but whatever you do, you'll regret it later.
8. You can't buy love. . But you pay heavily for it.
9. True friends stab you in the front.
10. Forgiveness is giving up my right to hate you for hurting me.
11. Bad officials are elected by good citizens who do not vote.
12. Laziness is nothing more than the habit of resting before you get tired.
13. My wife and I always compromise. I admit I'm wrong and she agrees with me.
14. Those who can't laugh at themselves leave the job to others.
15. Ladies first. Pretty ladies sooner.
16. It doesn't matter how often a married man changes his job, he still ends up with the same boss.
17. They call our language the mother tongue because the father seldom gets to speak.
18. Saving is the best thing. Especially when your parents have done it for you.
19. Wise men talk because they have something to say; fools talk because they have to say something.
20. Real friends are the ones who survive transitions between address books

Submitted by Jak van den Berg

Visit to Walter Sisulu Botanical Gardens

Our guide was a knowledgeable and friendly lady called Margaret. In her introductory talk she told us that there are eight National Botanical Gardens, of which Kirstenbosch is the head office. The Roodepoort Municipality bought the farm 25 years ago and donated it. Unfortunately they did not have the foresight to buy the surrounding land which has now become built-up and contributes to pollution. It took three years to clear out the alien plants. It is 210 ha. in size, has the famous Roodekrans, the Little Falls that is home to a pair of breeding Black Eagles, presently raising a 3 week old chick in a nest on the precipitous side of the cliff. The gardens are open from 8 am – 6pm every day of the year. Many of the dedicated staff have been there since its inception.

Concerts are held every alternate Sunday from 1pm – 3pm from Mothers Day in mid-May to the end of September, bringing together two of life's great joys – music and nature. Sappi's Sunday Picnic Concerts, while being a great way to enjoy wonderful outdoor entertainment with family and friends, brings in funds for use in the botanical garden. July's dates are 6 & 20. August 3, 17 & 31 and September 14 & 28. For those interested, the Garden's telephone number is 011 958 1750 and their website: www.sanbi.org.

Also unique to these gardens is the Geological Garden where you can “Take a Walk through Time” The rocks are set out in order of age from oldest to youngest. One starts at the large block with the map following the paved pathways. The time lines set into pathways show when important geological events occurred. The oldest rock is Greenstone, an ancient volcanic rock from the time when life on earth was simple and microscopic. The youngest is fossil wood formed where trees fell into stagnant water and dissolved minerals slowly replaced plant tissue. There were valuable rocks – gold bearing conglomerate, Kimberlite from where diamonds are mined and platinum from the Merensky Reef. Also shown are white spotted basalt, dolomite with white swirly patterns, shale, quartzite, coal etc. The path meanders through landscaped gardens with a fascinating selection of cycads. Unfortunately these are being targeted by thieves.

The lawns and plants were a picture. Many varieties of aloes were in spectacular flower, as were succulents and ground covers. There are over 25,000 plants grouped in clearly signed Theme Gardens e.g. Peoples Plants (herbs and medicinal). Amusing names like Plakkies and Slangkop with practical uses for e.g. Erythrina Plough breaker used for making pith helmets and Wormwood (*Artemesia*) used to treat everything from malaria to sprains. Euphorbias, Crassulas, Cycads, Kalanchoe and the Majestic Tree Aloe, Kranz Aloe and Quiver Trees all drew excited exclamations.

While admiring the falls and picking out the 2 nests we were fortunate to see one of the Black Eagles (*Witkruisarend*) circling above and being hassled by half a dozen crows. Later we saw the mother and fluffy baby chick on screen filmed from a strategically placed camera on the cliff. Talk about a well-timed visit. The 5kg female is about 25 years old and is bigger than the male. They have a wingspan of 2,5 m. Guinea fowl are their staple diet as dassies are now very scarce. Around March both eagles are seen, they lay fresh leaves in the nest and 2 eggs are laid 4 days apart. Incubation takes about 45 days. The first chick usually kills the second and starts to fly after 100 days (October). It is taught to hunt and is then kicked out into the wide world. The eagles are not seen for a few months before they return to repeat the cycle. The original male failed to return, but 5 years ago the lady found a virile toy boy!

The waterfall is fed by a spring in Ontdekkers Road and is the start of the Crocodile River. The mountain range is an important watershed. Many beautiful trees are dotted about including Mountain Silver Oak, Yellow Woods, Lavender trees, Wild Olive, River Bushwillow, Wild Pear to name but a few. We headed up through the “Wild section”, the Protea hillside which is frequently burned, the Sasol Cormorant Bird Hide and Dam, Wetland and a pool with Waterblommetjies and Arum Lilies to round off our tour in the reception office to view the Mom and chick. We either picnicked on the lawn or lunched at the restaurant before heading home. Our youngest member was as good as gold as she was pushed around in her pram, so we all enjoyed our day immensely and learned many new things.

*With kind permission of Irma Pennefather
Peglerae Garden Club*

*Written and compiled by Des Smith
Wednesday, 13 August 2008*