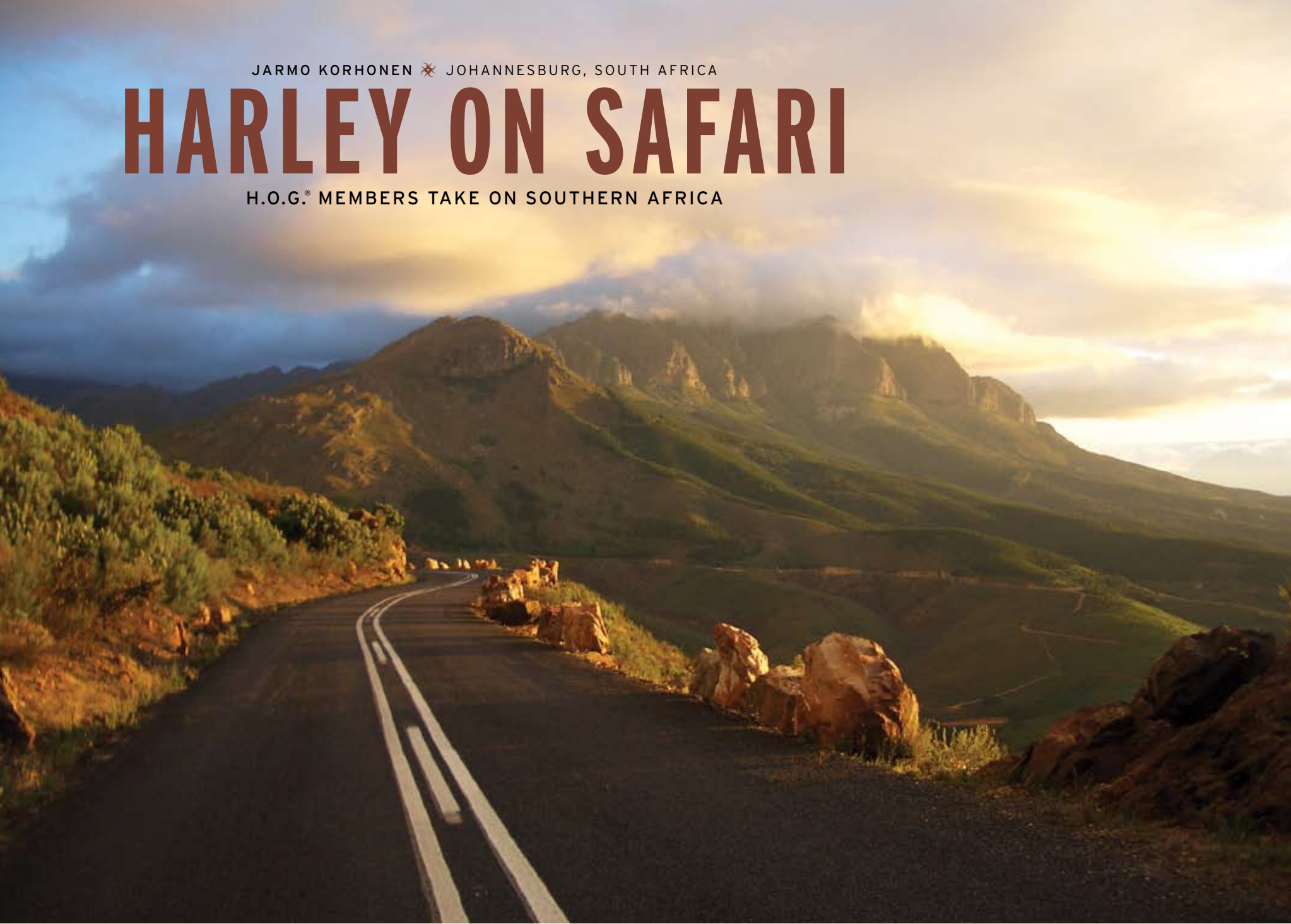


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# HARLEY ON SAFARI

H.O.G.® MEMBERS TAKE ON SOUTHERN AFRICA



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WONDERS OF AFRICA reveal themselves to us in blooms of ever-greater complexity, a humbling phenomenon aptly captured in an old saying about discovery: At first you know everything, gradually finding that you know maybe just a little bit, and finally admitting that you know nothing yet. To be exposed to these gifts while touring by Harley®? Well, that's just taking an awesome experience and making it sublime.

These truths explain the growing popularity of the posse ride held each year in conjunction with the Harley on Safari rally hosted by the Pretoria Chapter, South Africa. The first ride in 2005 was inspired by the U.S. Posse Rides that traverse the states, usually at a fairly aggressive pace. There is no "hurry" in Africa, though, so the 2007 Harley on Safari ride covered 3,875 miles over the span of three weeks, allowing more time for the experience to unfold fully before us.

## COASTING ALONG

The ride began on the continent's southwestern coast in Cape Town, the starting point for many significant expeditions throughout history and one of the most beautiful cities on earth. Table Mountain provides a dramatic backdrop for the city, which is beloved for its own style of music (Cape Jazz) and gorgeous beaches. For H.O.G. wine enthusiasts, the Stellenbosch and Robertson valleys are just short, scenic rides away.

We were an international group, to say the least, with us South African okses (guys) joined by riders from Australia, Canada, Brazil, Great Britain, Finland, Germany, Malta, Poland, Turkey, and the U.S., mostly on rental Harleys. This is how I learned that the tiny island nation of Malta offers 18-19 miles of highway – or about a tenth of our first day's ride, if you travel in one direction – as well as how to say "cheers" in Polish. And it would definitely be an international

ROADBOOK '07

MEMBER STORIES

21



ride, with our route going through South Africa, the Royal Kingdom of Swaziland, Botswana, and Zambia. The word "safari" originates from the Swahili language and means long journey, so the name Harley on Safari pretty much captures it.

We continued east along the coast to Cape Agulhas, the southernmost point of the African continent, and the place where the Indian and Atlantic oceans meet. It features a stone marker indicating the warmer Indian on the left and the cooler Atlantic on the right, and you can almost feel the difference if you put your hand into one ocean after the other. The village there also is a perfect setting for a South African braai, or barbecue, under the nighttime African sky and its billions of twinkling stars.

We had just one more coastal stop before turning toward the interior for good: the popular tourist city of Durban, a great place to have a day off to relax. It was quite hot, so I went swimming even though the waves seemed larger than I remembered them being. Several huge examples later, I landed on the shore in a rather humiliating manner, so I retired to a tidal pool for some exercise swimming against the current. A day later

*Continued ...*



**Left: All roads lead to paradise? There is a simple rule to follow in the South African rough mountains: Keep to the left.**

**Top: The starting point. Cape Town's famous Table Mountain made a perfect background for a group photo.**

**Bottom: The herd of wild Hogs leaving Kruger National Park in good order.**



**Top:** Kids in Africa are the same as everywhere in wanting a closer look at the shining machines passing their way.

**Middle:** Victoria Falls, “the smoke that thunders,” is the largest curtain of water in the world.

**Bottom:** Service in Africa is good, and Harley riders are treated as royalty, with parking provided in front of the Royal Livingstone Hotel.

we heard that the area had experienced its most destructive high tide in living memory, with multiple storms ravaging beaches and destroying houses. So that’s why the waves seemed up a bit. I couldn’t help but wonder what the interior held in store for us.

### THINGS START TO GET WILD

Our first inland target was the northern portion of the Drakensberg Mountains in east-central South Africa. From there, we took several rides to locations famous for their scenic beauty including Pilgrim’s Rest, the Blyde River Canyon, and God’s Window. By that point in the journey we’d also enjoyed several evening braais, which often included brilliant presentations of traditional African music and dance, not to mention lots of delicious boerewors sausages and biltong, a dried meat. If there was a better way to have digested those days filled with great riding, exciting events, and new experiences, I haven’t figured it out yet.

We made our way north to Kruger National Park, one of several devoted to maintaining the natural state of affairs in the region. We went on a number of game drives there, in the morning, afternoon, and evening, and saw many types of wild African animals. My closest encounter, however, would not occur until toward the end of the trip at a five-star hotel. While returning to my bungalow on foot from a party, I nearly had a head-on collision with a giraffe. It was quite surreal: looking at the black and white arch of the legs and then upward at the body and wondering if I should go through. Giraffes seem placid, but it’s good to remember that they’re wild animals.

We also spent a weekend in Sun City at the Harley on Safari rally, sharing a good time with many of our H.O.G. comrades from Johannesburg, Pretoria, and beyond. We already had so many stories to share and yet were only part of the way through with our journey. The stunning Victoria Falls lay ahead, and who knew what else.

### UP FOR THE CHALLENGE

Our path north to the great Zambesi River and Victoria Falls in Zambia would take



**Many things have changed since the days of the Great Trek and its ox wagons. Nowadays, South Africa boasts excellent roads anywhere you go.**

us through Botswana, and we headed to the capital city of Gaborone, near the nation’s border with South Africa. It was perhaps the best moment ever for the scooter-riding pizza delivery boy as he joined our pack on Gabarone’s busy streets, where all of us were riding in a tight and perfect staggered formation. He kept his position in the pack, his scooter’s pipe emitting a dense cloud of smoke from burning oil, all the way to the outskirts of the city. It was definitely one of those moments when you regret not having a camera at hand. I have never seen any biker being as precise and serious about riding as he was that day. He looked as though he considered it a great honor, and, as a matter of fact, he did quite well. It must have been a once-in-a-lifetime experience for him, such as we felt this tour was for us.

In a way, this episode was emblematic of the full approval we received from everyone we met on our journeys. People there pay respect to beautiful bikes, and they definitely want to express their joy to you upon seeing such magnificent machines, often for the first time in their lives. This cheerful attitude affected our team during the trip, as even

I found myself greeting all riders regardless of what motorcycle brand they rode. Who says you can’t teach an old oke new tricks?

Somebody said we passed 70,000 elephants on the last third of the tour. We definitely did not see them all, but we got undivided attention from all kinds of local habitans on the route. Rhinos, elephants, giraffes, fish eagles, crocodiles, and hippos were spotted during the tour, and specifically on the riverboat cruise from Mowana Safari Lodge in Chobe National Park, in northern Botswana.

### THE GIFTS OF ZAMBIA

Maybe one of the most meaningful memories for us was a stop somewhere in Zambia, where my wife, Saara, gave apples, among other things, to the local children as gifts, and these little ones did not know what to do with them. We only wished we had more apples stashed away to give. It must have been the same kind of feeling my mother had when she was a child and got an “American parcel” from Florida in which she found an orange, an exotic fruit that wasn’t available in Finland during World War II.

It was an extraordinary event for the kids of the village to experience for the first time in their lives a shiny, chromed-out Harley and all its attendant music, not to mention the joy they expressed for the little gifts they got. This extra stop in the village, where the church was made of sticks and

**“IF YOU HAVE EVER WANTED TO CHANGE ANYTHING IN AFRICA YOU’D BETTER FORGET IT BECAUSE AFRICA WILL CHANGE YOU!”**

mud and covered by a broken grass roof, should be seen in the context of a land where children suffer every day. Recently, a series of natural and man-made factors have slashed food output and availability across the region. A lot of African people are fighting for survival, but on that day,

although their clothes were ragged, there was a smile on the faces of those children.

Seeing Victoria Falls – among the world’s largest – was a true gift and a grand climax to the journey. I arranged for our flight to be 30 minutes instead of 15, to cover the gorges of the Zambesi River, as well. Although I am a pilot who has flown in Africa for many years and am rather used to that kind of stuff, the extra time was well worth it. Because as our fellow explorer Dr. David Livingstone, the first European to see that falls, wrote years earlier, “No one can imagine the beauty of the view from anything witnessed in England. It had never been seen before by European eyes; but scenes so lovely must have been gazed upon by angels in their flight.”

Then we were on the highway back to the crowded streets of Johannesburg to conclude our amazing journey, having gained countless blessings, in addition to the memories, fellowship, and beginnings of lifelong friendships. It has been said, and it is true: If you have ever wanted to change anything in Africa you’d better forget it because Africa will change you.