

Some lessons from Cape Vidal weekend

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I should perhaps start this with a disclaimer - that I am not apportioning blame, but purely making observations, so if someone feels aggrieved by some of these observations then “tough titty” as they say in the classics, because you should know from whence they came!

All outings require considerable planning, and this one started off with a few hiccups, especially with the bookings and commitments by members. This resulted in all the chalets being booked up when we finally got our act together. This meant that we had to camp. Graeme did a sterling job in getting this all arranged, collecting money from all and making the necessary payments.

Prior to departure, emails were bouncing back and forth, starting with Bruce saying that, in order to avoid **duplication**, he would be bringing the milk and the sugar. We ended up with **9 litres** of milk between the four of us, one was squashed in the trailer and we took back 5 litres of milk!

I suggested that we should go a bit further than this (as far as duplication was concerned), and look at the meals, starting with morning risers of coffee and rusks before the mornings fishing, followed by a breakfast/brunch, followed by lunch and then dinner (which was going to be a braai on both nights). I said that I would bring the rusks. We ended up with three packets of rusks! But admittedly, we did use two packets over the weekend. Bruce was going to bring the butter and I sneaked in a bit as well - “in case”. For lunch, I was going to bring the ham, but, as you would have guessed by now, we had two lots of ham. I could go on and on, but as you can see, we either do not trust our fellow campers in providing what they said they would, or else, did not read the emails, I suspect the former, but likewise, we are all cautious anglers and believe in “just in case”?

The Durbanites knew that the South Coasters were well organised and did not need to be part of our food arrangements.

We squeezed all of our fishing and camping gear, along with the food and drink into Bruce’s double cab and trailer, complete with a bar fridge (well done Graeme), before heading off to our first traditional stop for coffee on the road. The next stop was St Lucia Wimpy, for the traditional breakfast. Bruce did a great job of getting us safely and comfortably to and from Cape Vidal.

There were going to be 6 of us on the trip, spread between 3 tents, Arthur and Neil, (who were driving up from Port Shepstone) in one, Warren and Bruce in Bruce’s tent and Graeme and I in my tent. Warren’s gazebo proved to be an essential item for our comfort, along with Bruce’s groundsheet.

When Graeme and I discussed the sleeping arrangements, I said that I had a queen sized inflatable mattress, but he said that he was going to speak to Ian and see if he could borrow his stretchers, which according to him were luxury ones, complete with foam mattresses (what else would you expect from Mr Cox). When we erected them we found that we had a problem! **They**

did not fit in my tent. “Why did I always think that your tent was bigger than this?” were Graeme’s words. So there we were, resigned to sleeping on the ground, when (maak a plan) Warren said that we should check on the size of the stretchers in Neil and Arthur’s tent (they had gone fishing) and promptly brought one out. It fitted perfectly, so Graeme and I were going to speak to Arthur and Neil to see if we could swop. Not to be, Warren and Bruce, decided that, as a prank, we make the swop and see if they noticed, which they duly did, swapped the stretchers that is. I must admit that I felt a little uncomfortable with the arrangement, but I let it be. A negative of this was that when we went fishing later on, Arthur and Neil were in a great spot and were catching shad and wave garrick, and Bruce had also joined them. Warren had passed through the area heading north. I wondered if they had told them about the stretchers. I wanted to join them in their honey hole, but was rather embarrassed in case they had not been told. I thrashed the water around and only had a few long-line releases. Later Bruce told me to join them, but by this time Arthur and Neil had wandered off, as the fishing had tailed off. When I returned from fishing, Neil and Arthur were in the camp preparing lunch and I asked them if Bruce or Warren had said anything about the stretchers, and when they said “no”, I told them to look in their tent. I apologised for the prank, and true gentlemen that they are, left the stretchers as they were. The next morning when I asked Neil how he had slept on the stretcher, he said that the bar at the end of the stretcher got in the way as he was used to, with his height, having his feet hang over the end of **his** stretcher, which had no bar. So he did not sleep that well.

When you plan to braai each evening, make sure that the campsite has braai facilities, or make arrangements to take your own! Seems pretty obvious I know, but the collective memory of those that had camped there before, were **sure** that there were braai facilities, but could not remember the condition of the grids. As we all know, most facility’s grids are usually in an awful condition so, at our stop at St Lucia Spar, we bought a folding grid – just in case. We also bought two bags of charcoal. When we arrived at our site – **no braai facilities were in sight**. Not a problem - there were two pieces of concrete and a few rocks lying around, and we had a grid, so we could make a braai on the ground. As it turned out, Arthur had a tiny braai on which we managed to cook all of our meat, and the fire was still strong enough to cook for many more as well. We ended up taking two bags of charcoal home with us. The only problem with the braai is that Graeme could not fit his potatoes and onions which he was hoping to pop into the fire, so they were boiled instead. As I said, the South Coast boys are well prepared. In fact they work extremely well as a team, but Arthur above all, is busy all the time. I think that we should nickname him “the Duracell Bunny, or Mr Duracell” as he is constantly on the go. His expertise lies also in the preparation of delicious canapés which he fed us as starters each night, followed by fruit salad.

Ben Pretorius, in all his articles on fishing in the salt, especially from the rocks, emphasises the need for anglers to wear a personal flotation device and he markets one (which I think might be made by Tripper). On Friday morning, Bruce “went for a swim” after trying to land a fish using his stripping basket as a net. He admitted that he had quite a fright after being washed off the sandbank and into a channel where the current was heading seawards at a rate of knots, and had a battle to get to safety. Now Bruce is a sprightly chap, ex lifesaver and all, and can generally get himself out of trouble, but it could so easily have turned tragic. (*I didn’t lose the fish though – a stonebream which almost fitted diagonally across the stripping basket - Bruce*). I had a taste of

this as well when I was fishing off a sandbank on Saturday. It was about 20 m wide with a nice deep gulley on the shoreside. The waves were breaking on to the sand bank and shooting across the bank, taking any small creatures into the gulley where I was “certain” to catch. There was quite a wash from the gulley and all I had to do was cast onto the sand bank and my fly would be washed into the gulley and I could fish the wash. The water was coming across about 100mm deep and was no threat, when all of a sudden, one of these double waves broke onto the sandbar and a wall of water came whooshing across, and nearly dumped me into the gulley. **It was so close!** I promptly backed off from the edge and made my way off the sandbank. I would like to reiterate Ben’s warning, and suggest that we should all be using these flotation devices when fishing in the salt. Ben markets these devices and it is worth approaching him, or Tripper.

I should also mention that Bruce returned on Saturday afternoon, without his cap and missing his fly box. His cap went astray, without his being aware of it, as he was wearing a buff which he stretches over the top of his head, and never felt it being blown or washed off. His fly box was **secure** in his top pocket, closed by velcro strips. However he found that they were not so secure, and lost a box full of flies. One of the problems when you are constantly being “klapped” by the waves is that everything must be secure. I have found that, since I have been using a backpack and keep everything in the backpack, that everything is secure and do not get as wet as it used to when I wore a kidney belt pack.

Talking about being klapped by the waves. I was constantly being hit by the waves rushing up the beach. So I was always soaked, and my sunglasses were always wet with spray. In fact I complained that I was a “wave magnet” because every time that I would find an area of calmer water, no sooner had I started aerialising my line when a big wave would come up and klap me in the midriff or on my basket. Bang would go my rhythm, and the line and fly would fall in a bunch on the water. I suggested that the next time I should wear a cricketer’s box to protect myself.

Beastly-easterly winds bring blue bottles! Especially when blowing for some time. In our preplanning, Graeme and I had agreed that we would need to take along wading boots and long pants to protect ourselves against blue bottles. On Friday the wind was from the south, and no bluebottles were in sight, so we all, except Neil (who wore longs all the time whilst fishing), wore shorts. Much the same on Saturday morning, but when Bruce and Warren returned at lunch time they reported that the north east wind was pumping and that there were blue bottles around. So, for our late afternoon session, I wore longs. And at one time on the beach, Bruce warned me that a blue bottle tail was wrapped around my leg, so I had been saved a lot of pain and discomfort by wearing long pants. Much against his own recommendations, Graeme had ventured off with shorts and had to cut his fishing short after having been nailed a few times by the blue bottles, as did all the rest who had worn shorts. What was interesting, was that Graeme was watching the ghost crabs nip off the tails of the blue bottles before dragging the rest of the blue bottle down their hole. Warren said that this explained why he had found just a blue bottle tail wrapped around his leg. As I am writing this, I am wondering if anyone had taken along anything to combat blue bottle stings?

Car doors break rods! An axiomatic fact. I have written about this and have warned people at clinics time and again that car doors, so often turn two piece rods into four piece rods. On this trip my 3 piece became a 4 piece. I had two rods, lying alongside another two, on the top of the

double cab, well out of the way of any doors. However when the front door was opened, the rod slipped down, and unnoticed, became crunched by the door when closed. What was stupid about it, was that I had already decided that I would not be fishing the last session and should have taken it down. And when you think about it, it does not take that long to put up a rod anyway, so the safest place for your rod after a fishing session, is back in your tube.

Camp site selection - we ended up taking pot luck as far as our campsite was concerned and ended up towards the furthest end of the camp. It was large enough for our three tents and gazebo, and close to the ablutions (I was very impressed with the ablutions which were clean and have been fairly modernised). We were told later that our site was usually hot and too exposed (to passing people traffic). I told Marcia, who made the comment (who has been going to Vidal for the last 20 years) that at least we get to talk to some attractive ladies and get to find out if they have dams on their properties. In fact she did, farming in the Swartberg, close to all the good trout fishing dams, and they have two bass dams. She has a self-catering cottage on the farm Krom Drift and can arrange fishing at all the popular spots in the area ie Banchory, Hopewell, St Bernard etc. She has a web site kromdrift.co.za. Graeme also met Mark from Stutterheim who also had some bass dams. As far as I was concerned, I had no complaints about our site, aside from the long walk to the beach. The point I am making about the camp site selection is that our site could have been worse, and that it is better to be able to pre-book your site. I would gladly have the same site again (No 11), but on our way out we took note of some of the "better" sites. Hopefully we will remember which ones they were when we come to book for the next trip.

So, that is a selection of some of the lessons learnt on this trip. I could have expanded more on a few more lessons, like it being difficult to drink hot coffee from a stainless steel cup without a handle, and, if you have an inflatable mattress, ensure that you have a pump! I am certainly not complaining about the above "lessons" – in fact I found them collectively amusing, and they make the whole trip that more memorable. Once again, I must reiterate the old cliché, that fishing trips are not only about catching fish. They are much much, more, giving you lasting memories of places and fellow members, so when next there is another outing, join in, and you will not regret it.
