



TRAVELS WITH A BLACK POT

If I had asked Mr Peter Hunter (my House Tutor back in 1989) what he thought I might end up doing with my life, I seriously doubt whether he would have replied "running a company called Black Pot Safaris specialising in privately guided, gourmet, self-drive safaris for the discerning traveller throughout southern Africa." So just how exactly does a nice Harrow boy end up operating safaris in southern Africa?

I left Harrow in July 1989 with a head full of dreams and that sudden excitement that comes from finally being unleashed on an unsuspecting world with not a clue as to what to actually do! So I embarked on a year of discovery – otherwise known as a gap year – to India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. This year of travel changed my life and I returned with a passion for exotic destinations and a hunger to explore more of the wildlife, wild places and cultures of the world. I had decided that I wanted to be the next David Attenborough! But, alas, life is neither that easy nor that simple.

The next decade saw me perform in a variety of different guises. I spent five long years working as a commodity futures trader until I realised that my heart wasn't in it, and the next five indulging myself. I spent my time diving in Antigua (courtesy of an OH friend of mine), crewing a 65 foot Nauta Swan (the Rolls Royce of sailing boats) on a trans-Atlantic crossing, riding fast Italian motorbikes, hanging pictures in an art gallery, apprenticing as chef to rock stars and finally touring with Lenny Kravitz, but it was a chance meeting with an OH friend's sister in a pub in Notting Hill that was to change the direction of my life forever.

Now eighteen years after leaving Harrow,

I find myself settled in Africa with my wife Amanda (daughter of Christopher Castleman (*Rendalls 1954*¹) and sister of Jonathan Castleman (*Rendalls 1985*¹) and Nicholas Castleman (*The Head Master's 2007*¹). We live in Mpumalanga in South Africa with our collection of Land Rovers and two mad Boxer dogs. This is the country's most eastern province, affectionately known as 'the place where the sun rises', and it is perfectly situated for visits to the world-famous Kruger National Park and its upmarket lodges, the majestic beaches of Mozambique and the mountainous kingdom of Swaziland.

This move wasn't as random as it may sound because although I'd never set foot on African ground I grew up listening to stories of my father's childhood in Kenya. Both he (Alastair Bond Gunning (*West Acre 1950*²)) and my uncle (Rufus Bond Gunning (*West Acre 1954*³)) were born in Kenya and schooled in Africa until they were old enough to go to Harrow. These stories created a lasting impression and provided me with the knowledge to embrace a continent which was totally alien to me.

Seven years on, I can claim that we have driven over 65,000 kilometres through desert and dunes, across plains, down rivers, over pans and into the delta in our Land Rovers in search of the very best wildlife and wild places that southern Africa has to offer. We have spent 260 nights sleeping in complete comfort under canvas, cooked over 200 mouth-watering meals on the fire in our black pots, explored over 30 game reserves and national parks, shot 10,000 photographs, identified over 90 species of mammal and spotted over 400 different birds.

This has been achieved partly on our own photographic expeditions and partly

in convoy with our adventurous clients on a Black Pot Safari. When not on safari we manage Killarney Farm House in Mpumalanga which is an exclusive, single-party destination for families wanting to experience life on an African farm. We also sell limited-edition wildlife photographs and design websites and promotional material for the ecotourism industry. We will turn our hands to pretty much anything that helps promote conservation and tourism – the key to a sustainable future for Africa and its future generations. Then, when time allows, there are our coffee-table and children's books to get published and a few wildlife documentary concepts to get on air – I've never quite got over that dream to be the next David Attenborough!

As you can see our African life keeps us busy and we hope to be busier still. We have been researching exciting new safari destinations for our clients from combination bush and beach safaris for families to wild Zambia safaris for gap year students placed in our care by trusting parents. We will also soon open the doors of our new home in Johannesburg to guests who want to stay privately 'At home in Africa' and enjoy the best décor, cuisine and personalised service available when travelling through Johannesburg.

All in all I don't think I've done too badly for someone who left Harrow with no clue as to his future and five years of self-indulgence under his belt! But before I sign off, I have some advice to offer today's young Harrovians as they look to decipher their future: travel as much as you can, experience as many different continents and cultures as possible, don't commit to anything too soon and don't forget your dreams.

PATRICK BOND GUNNING (*THE PARK 1984*⁴)