

Another Great Meerhof School Trip to the Kruger National Park!

By Aiden Robertson

Thanks to all the hard work and preparation by the teachers and staff of the Meerhof School for the Physically Disabled, under the careful guidance of Allen Joss, Christine Mare and the New Kid on the block, Sonya van Wyk, the 2016 annual Kruger Park Trip – trip number 68 was again a great success.



The 2016 party included 24 deserving learners from the school mostly in grades 8, 9 and 10, who through their achievements and behaviour during the year were selected for the trip.

The day started very early with a lovely breakfast provided by the Meerhof School.

The group departed in the early hours of Sunday morning August 14. The drivers, including Rotarians Allen Joss, Grant Adam and Aiden Robertson, and the dedicated Carers, one per vehicle for the week, set off in a group of eight vehicles. En route to Kruger they stopped at the Wimpy in the Grove Mall Nelspruit for hamburgers, chips and cold drinks generously sponsored again this year by the management of Wimpy! They arrived at Skukuza, which served as the base camp, on Sunday afternoon having entered the Park via the Phabeni gate.



The learners and their allocated dedicated Carers set off on the Monday morning after breakfast for the historical sites and the James Stevenson Museum in Skukuza for a presentation on the formation and history of the Park. From there everybody went on to the Educational and Environmental Centre and the Rhino 'Boma' outside Skukuza where mostly the orphans of poached Rhinos are housed for safekeeping before eventually being returned to the bush. The rest of the day was largely devoted to game viewing.



Not fun and games all day long

The learners in each vehicle were tasked with completing daily educational task sheets on interesting facts they had been exposed to and to describe the highlight of their day in their own words. They also needed to tick off a daily sightings list of animals and birds. Each evening at supper a winning book for the day was announced. The kids worked hard to prepare their assignment books before the trip. Tuesday's game viewing was very rewarding for Rotarians Grant and Aiden who, driving in convoy, were lucky enough to have ticked off all of the big





five before meeting up with the rest of the group for a lunch time braai at the Tshokwane picnic spot which is on the way to Satara.

Each member on the trip, including the learners, carers, teaching staff, *Ooms* (Uncles), *Mammas* (Mothers) and the rest of the support team were



allocated specific tasks during the trip as per a prepared worksheet for the week - helping with the preparation of the meals, cooking and braai duties, washing the dishes after a meal, etc.



On Wednesday, the lunch time stop-over was at the Lower Sabie public picnic enclosure and on Thursday after a shortened game drive, a brief stop-over at the Skukuza International Airport where the learners were able to stand on the fringe of the runway to witness the landing of several planes, including a large double engine Airlink jet. The whole group met up at the public swimming pool and picnic facility near Skukuza camp for the learners to have an opportunity to

relax and enjoy a rather icy swim in the pool. The *Ooms* were responsible for the braai once again with the ladies preparing hamburgers and salad for all.

The occupants of each of the eight vehicles were given the title of a song and had to all participate in putting on a brief concert on the Thursday evening. The participation from each team which included the *Ooms*, *Mammas*, teachers, the support team and particularly all the Learners was a definite highlight of the trip. So sorry we were not able to video the evening to show you all. It was a humbling, yet uplifting experience and the enthusiastic participation of all the learners was wonderful. They participated in all activities and their antics during the concert were enjoyed by all. I really hope that this is repeated in next year's trip, which will be Allen Joss's 50th trip and the 68th time that the children from the Meerhof School are taken to the Park.



Braai at Meerhof School

On Wednesday evening, August 17, the Principal of Meerhof School, Rita Burgers and her staff generously hosted the Rotarians and their partners who were not on the Kruger Park trip, to a braai at the school, in recognition of the Rotary Club of Pretoria East's contribution to the school over the years.

The braai, which was also attended by some of the learners from the school who did not go on the trip, was a very special evening and included a visit to the recently renovated girls hostel at the school. This kind gesture by the School is truly appreciated by the Club members.

On a rather sad note, the trip to the Kruger National Park revealed that the drought is having a devastating impact in the Park and its animals.

On the right is a photo taken on the road between Skukusa and the Tshokwane picnic spot! There is hardly any vegetation for the animals to eat and absolutely no water to be seen anywhere. Unless there is some rainfall soon the animals are going to be under high extremely pressure to survive!

