

Clegg News  
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Sunset and storm near Keetmanshoop, southern Namibia

**W**inter. £169 818 would, back in 1789, build you a transpennine canal, including a 4920 foot tunnel at the summit.. The tunnel is at the top of the Leeds Liverpool canal, an unassuming wonder of civil engineering from the days when civil engineers were self taught. It winds round the contours of the Pennines linking Skipton in the Aire Valley, with Ribblesdale, on the west side. Though planned in the mid-eighteenth century it was not opened until the end of it by which time, as is not unusual with civil engineering projects, the cost had escalated manyfold. The canal replaced the ancient pack-horse routes that can still be found, criss-crossing the Pennines that had been, until then, the life-line of the people. For nearly a century this canal was the pulmonary artery of the industrial revolution. The men that legged the boats through the tunnel (lying on their backs in total darkness pushing against the walls with their feet) while the towpath horses walked over the top) made profitable the machine-produced cotton and woollen cloth of the north of England and provided Cheshire's embryonic chemical industry with its coal and lime lifeblood from Yorkshire. Within eighty years, however, larger arteries were needed and a second wave of civil engineering

produced the transpennine railways with their spectacular viaducts. The 48 spans of the Whalley Arches, behind Blackburn, which used seven million bricks and 436 000 cubic feet of stone (and cost only £35 000) to build, is one of the most impressive. The Whalley Arches are where Nana, my mother-in-law, and her Blackburn friends would meet before they set off on their cycling tours in the hills during the war. Now, at 82, and living in a home, her memory of those days remains crystal clear. "What is his name then?" she interjects now and then during the details of her wartime cycle rides. "Andrew", Eileen (daughter) would reply, "Same as his grandfather". "Oh yes", she would reply with confidence, " I wont forget that will I?". She does though. Immediately.

The four generations of us made a number of trips up into this still rich countryside this year, descending on some unsuspecting Heathland pub for lunch. This tended to give baby ("What did you say his name was?") Andrew, the wind but there is nothing like Skipton cobbles in a pushchair for sorting out a bit of wind. Nana didn't have wind and she didn't like cobbles, particularly as they were usually covered with ice. The real problem with Skipton for Nana, however, was that it was

across the border over in Yorkshire, but she followed us around politely enduring it.



**S**axton, July, George is the man that puts the numbers up on the hymn number board and he is the last of the Saxton Beans. His father was Jack Bean and his grandfather was James Bean and the Beans have farmed in Saxton for millennia. James it was, who sold Dad the land in Saxton back in 1948, on which the house was built. Jack used to supply us, and the rest of the village, with milk which was frothy and fresh from the cow and tasted of turnips. But the seven family farms that were then in Saxton have now become only two and the Bean farm is one that disappeared. With George, the Saxton Beans will pass into history. James and Jack were part of my childhood. James had, what seemed to me then to be the worlds largest cat and they both had wives who were both called Mrs Bean. George did not, we thought in those days, understand about wives. In fact, we did not think that George really understood much about anything and he was not groomed by his father to take over the Bean agricultural dynasty. When we greeted George he used to smile at us, think deeply, and say

'Aye'. And we would go our ways. We never heard George say anything but 'Aye'. That he understood about hymn numbers was a well-kept secret.

Grandson Andrew's christening started with 'All things Bright and Beautiful'. This is one of those fine hymns written about a hundred and thirty years ago when you could build 48 arches for £35 000 and God was in His Heaven, the Empire was His Empire, women were called by their husband's names and one of them was a lady called Cecil. Her full name was Cecil Frances Alexander, or rather Mrs Cecil Frances Alexander, to remind us that he was a women. 'All things Bright and Beautiful' is her description of the world as it should be, and indeed, in those days, as it was, and the lesson was that God has made it so. The central verse goes:

*The rich man in his castle  
The poor man at his gate  
God made them, high or lowly  
And order'd their estate*

Unfortunately, this splendid verse was removed in the second half of the twentieth century when it was felt to be inconsistent with the values that the Church was trying to promote during that curious period, and New Labour has not yet got round to reinstating it.

But it was not the lost verse that gave George the problem, it was that it was hymn number 444 and the hymn that followed was 442. Between them these hymns used up five of the six number fours that George had in his kit. And both of the subsequent hymns had a four in their number. George, however, was not to be beaten. The last hymn was on the board as 26, with a gap between the 2 and the 6, and during the communion George quickly ducked out of the queue as he drew level with the hymn board and moved one of the fours down so that the last hymn became 246.

Andrew missed this excitement; he was asleep. He woke up briefly at the font, to make a lunge for the candle. Quick as a flash, to prevent any serious mishap, the experienced vicar splashed water all over him. Andrew looked a little surprised for a few moments and then went back to sleep.



The problem with woodlice is that they are too small to get to know individually. Its not the same with cockroaches. The one-antennaed cockroach in Dar that came along to the living room each evening, I knew lived down a particular hole behind the toilet, so I could always help him home after

a hard evening if necessary. But with woodlice things are not so. I did a rehabilitation job on the study in my Somerset house this year which blocked up all their holes and so they were left climbing aimlessly up the newly pointed walls and congregating in the corners. Because I didn't know who they were I didn't know where they came from or how to help them. But they have gone now so I hope they have found somewhere congenial in the new room.

The whole operation was precipitated by the antique maker down the road who told me that my life would be changed forever if only I would just go out and buy an Angle Grinder. For the uninitiated reader, angle grinders do an awful lot more than just grind angles. I bought the biggest one that ready money could buy and discovered a fireplace with it. After the briefest of grinds, an immense Hamstone lintel and fire surround appeared as from nowhere and I stopped and stepped back to admire it only to find that it disappeared again. I suspected dust on my glasses. It was; when I had cleaned my glasses I had a very clear view of the dust that was obscuring my view of the fireplace.

The antique maker had warned me about the dust and said that I must

also get a proper respirator (8812D, sanding and fibreglass, he said). I read the friendly instructions which told me that I would be protected for concentrations of the contaminant up to four times the occupational exposure limit. But in heavy type it warned 'do not use beards or other facial hair that may inhibit contact with the face'. Problem was it did not tell me what I was not supposed to use them for.

To set off the new old fireplace and the newly exposed angle-ground elm wall frames to perfection I got the antique maker to make me a perfect set of antique pine fitted cupboards, complete with pre-rusted nail holes, the whole finished in finest antique pine wax polish which imparts, at one rub, the golden glow of centuries of wear and care.

For the other urgent repair work, I got in a professional heating engineer. This was a mistake. Although he made the boiler work, he also issued me with a formal written warning, pursuant to the Gas Safety (Installations and use) Regulations 1994 and its Amendment Regulations, 1996. The little room in which the boiler was housed did not apparently have the required ventilation, to wit, a hole of area 236 square centimetres at the top of the door and

another, also of 236 square centimetres, at the bottom. This is important, it seems, to allow carbon monoxide that might be produced in freak conditions, to escape from the cupboard and poison whoever was sleeping in the neighbouring bedroom.

I explained that the door in which these are to be installed was always open because movement of the house, caused by the way Dan plays his music upstairs, had made the door frame rhomboid whereas the door remained rectangular and you can't get a rectangular door into a rhomboidal frame. (The same movement also has left the study ceiling supported only by a copy of 'A Passage to India' on the top shelf, and when I removed the Passage the ceiling fell in). He patiently explained that it was an EU directive that the door must have two ventilation holes of 236 square centimetres each irrespective of whether or not it could be shut.



We'd like to try the Hofmeyr walk", they said, "would you like to come with us". Now, the Hofmeyr walk is an attractive footpath around a little conservation area on a hill in central Windhoek and it was particularly interesting in May because all

the aloes were in flower. (Windhoek is renowned for its Aloes; as a contribution to the millennium celebrations, it has erected a 20 foot steel aloe in the centre of town subtly illuminated with the words 'Enjoy Coca Cola'). But they added that they were not too happy about going there alone because of stories of muggings. I checked the mugging story; "only in the evenings I think," was a friend's confident response. And so it was that Laura and Irma, the two Dutch students who stayed with me for much of the year, and I, decided to put our heads in the noose to see how it felt. Despite the fine view I decided that maybe I would not take my camera.

The mugging process gets terribly complicated when the mugger does not speak English and the mugger only has two words of Afrikaans which are 'asseblief' and 'wortel'. Neither seemed particularly appropriate for requesting him to stop waving his knife around. Nonetheless negotiations seemed to be going reasonably well and he had actually dropped the keys that he had removed from my pocket, when Laura decided that negotiation based on two words was a futile tactic and chopped the second one off at the knees with a flying tackle.

This not only seemed to lead to more knife waving but apparently caused me to remember the English word 'money'. It was at this point that I realised that if you are concerned about being mugged the smart thing to do is not to leave all your money at home but bring just a small amount packed into a large wallet. Explaining in Afrikaans to a knife waving psychopath that you left it all at home in order to thwart his plans puts you at something of a disadvantage. Fortunately perhaps, 'wortel asseblief' did not seem to convey the entire meaning. He was also, by then, becoming a little distracted by the curious noises Laura was making. She later explained that, as a dedicated researcher, she was trying to interview her assailant but that she could not remember the questions because he had his foot on her head.

Finally they decided that Laura's father's camera and her student union card and Dutch driving licence was about the best they were going to get so they leapt into their unmarked Golf and careered off down the hill. The police later got them and we were called in to try and identify anything. There was a whole room full of bags, rucksacks, mobile phones and GPSs but sadly no cameras.



An odd thing about the seasons in Namibia is that there are only two, summer and winter. Even odder is that the change from one to the other does not happen slowly but abruptly. So it was, that at 4.30 am, give or take an hour or so, one Monday towards the end of April, winter started.

The nice thing about Namibian winters is that they are crystal clear with bright blue cloudless skies from dawn to dusk. This is in marked contrast to summers - to proper summers - where the skies are full of clouds, friendly white fluffy things, angry fast-growing grey-based mushrooms, fiery pink sunset-lit clouds. Every kind and shape of cloud that our atmosphere is capable of making, it makes here, in Namibia, in summer.

That Sunday, a few hours before winter started, summer reached its final climax and cut the roads in front of and behind, the Landrover. We were on our way home from a dip in the desert. The week before, rain had fallen heavily across the desert and a number of the rivers that cut their deep, normally dry, courses through the desert, flooded, taking with them everything in their way; roads, bridges, boulders, trees, the tents and cars of holiday makers, and Walvis Bay waterworks.





A giant Ficus in the dry bed of the Auchab, which feeds Sossusvlei. It was torn up when this dry river flooded a week before this was taken

One of these rivers never makes it to the coast because its valley is blocked for the last 60 kilometres by the world's largest sand dunes. So the water just spreads out and stays there, giving the old camelthorns that have seen countless such freak seasons (and this was a fifty year record) but which have their long roots well into the aquifers below to keep them going in rainless years, one of their 30 year drinks. Sossusvlei, the place is called, and is one of the planet's natural wonders. It is a special place at all times but on this occasion it was unique.

We were amongst the first handful of Landrovers let in just before dawn on Sunday morning. Few people were there because word had gone out that the floods were so bad that the vlei was inaccessible. The dawn light on the dunes was what we were after but in the event, after about 10 minutes from sunup, the dunes were in the shadow of the last cloud of the summer. But by the time we had splashed through the axle-deep mud at the end of the valley before we hit the sand, the sun once again lit up the oasis and the dunes were perfectly reflected in the totally still

water as we stopped under a bird-filled Camelthorn.



We decided to look at it all from the highest dune and made quickly for the shady side. Sand has a curious bulk property. When it is hot it behaves like a liquid; it pours and you sink in it. But when it is cold it behaves like a solid, remaining hard so you can walk on its surface. So if you want to

get to the top of a 500m dune you do it on the shady side early in the morning.

From the top the whole oasis is visible, normally a mass of highly specialised plants and animals found nowhere else but today all were reflected in a great mass of still water marking the place where the river finally sinks below the sand we had climbed upon, for the final sixty kilometres of its journey to the Atlantic.



Floods in the Namib. The picture below is the view from the other side of the dune



We had left two of our party back at base camp at 4am that morning. the one because she was suffering from Sidney flu, the other because she had titanium hips. You cant, it seems, walk very far in sand if you have titanium hips. So we left the vlei mid-morning and returned to base. Base was on a farm some seventy kilometres upstream at the end of a 10km rocky river-bed and mountain trail at the edge of one of the permanent springs that exist here and there in the desert. In normal times these springs are water-holes for the kudu and mountain zebra, two of the desert animals that cant get quite enough water for their needs just from what they eat. But times were not normal, so the only large mammals there were the two Dutch students that came with us, who had taken heavily to the novelty of naked bathing in rock pools the middle of a desert, there being not much opportunity for that kind of thing in the Netherlands.

An interesting thing about the camp were the flowering stones. These are rather odd plants that disguise themselves as stones but then spoil it all after the rains by growing large yellow flowers. Like much of the vegetation they are unique to the area and, incredibly, one variety we saw (and Laura trod on) is believed to be unique to the

farm. Nothing in Namibia is ordinary. The rain that fell that day on the way home was heavy even by Namibian standards. It was the kind that washes the road away from under the tyres as you go. Staying on the road was a matter of pure guesswork and the main trick was to keep to an absolutely even speed and keep a sharp eye on the road just in front and stop quickly if it looked as though the water was all flowing fast in one particular direction. Landrovers, as I found out on an earlier trip (the storm shown in the photograph at the beginning of this letter), will go reasonably well through water as long as it does not go much above the headlights (though the doors leak a bit), but the real danger is meeting a fast flowing stream sideways on.

Eventually, of course, we hit a river we could not get through. And by then, we knew that all the others that we had come through would be impassable behind us. So we stopped and watched the rain stop and the sun set and waited with a small excited queue, for the river to pass.



**The Family.** Eileen and her partner Dominic bought a house in Southport so that baby Andrew, has somewhere more fixed than an itinerant plastic manger for a bed. They came to Namibia in the summer for A's first safari (see [www.asclegg.demon.co.uk/fam-ily](http://www.asclegg.demon.co.uk/fam-ily))

he is enjoying although he seems to have a tendency to get his name in the incident book.



Dan seems to have developed a liking for writing. He has written off two cars and is now writing three A levels.



and E is now back at work 'entering the data'. How did we ever manage to get PhDs before we had data to enter? Andrew, now fourteen months, has been enrolled at Liverpool University creche which





Four generations

Rose stays at a sheltered home in Tavistock and works during the day at a centre for the handicapped there and Tom has managed to get the A-levels he wanted for a media studies degree but has taken a year out to decide whether he really wants a media studies degree after all.

I'm still in Windhoek, an attractive little town and an ideal place for anyone, like me, addicted to unexcitement. I have another year to complete the work setting up a science and mathematics management unit in the Namibian Education Ministry, a kind of Laboratory Force Team that, in a fleet of EU Landrovers descends on schools

and in no time at all, transforms the most unpromising prep rooms into neat tidy places you would be very happy to sit and have a nice cup of tea in.

Chemicals, under the pre-independence Administrations were not ordered, they were just supplied, without, it would appear, any regard for need. So here are fourteen unopened bottles of naphthalene, There also are ten bottles of Nessler's reagent (contains mercury), and six large packs of the finest blue asbestos wool, one opened at the corner to allow the fibres to percolate to all corners of the laboratory, There again, nineteen bottles of sodium and 12 kg of copper

carbonate. In one school, twenty six litres of ethyl acetate and everywhere, masses of carcinogens and long dried spontaneously flammable, white phosphorus.

So we confiscate box upon box of carcinogens, poisons, flammables and explosives, all essential, apparently, to the teaching of the old Matric programme, and pack all into the back of the Landrover, which was carefully marked on the door with the EU stars to ease us undetected through police road blocks that search only for Angolan bombs.



One interesting feature of Bushman rock art that not many people know is that if you are red-green colourblind, you cant see it. So I spent a rather surreal Easter in the Erongo mountains looking at panels of bare rock discussing all the dancing women with brooms chasing headless ostriches or being pursued by swarms of bees that I could not see on them. To an education consultant, however, discussing intelligently matters you know nothing about, is second nature.

The farmer owner of the rock art sites has, of late, come to realise that he can make more money opening

a small camp site and taking people round his rock art than he ever could struggling to rear cattle on the arid desert edge. But his farmyard is still intact in this dry country, iron does not rust. and so, in the neat yard of long unfunctional machinery, is an early 50s grey Fergie of the kind I learnt to drive on at Blackburn's farm at Saxton over 40 years ago. In those days a twelve year old could not easily throw corn loggins up to the top of the trailer so his job was to drive the tractor very slowly past the stooks. There was also an old Lister diesel single cylinder pop pop engine that, with a belt, drove everything everywhere for last 60 years of the Empire, a rusting fossil of a now long-gone age, the last descendent in a direct line from the Leeds-Liverpool canal and the Whalley arches. The Lister diesel would not have existed without the Empire but what is less clearly understood is that the Empire could not have existed without the Lister diesel and its like. The two interacted symbiotically to bring prosperity, simultaneously, to the motherland and the colonies.

Lister-Petter, just up the road here in the West Country, is currently fighting off receivership. So is Zimbabwe. The two are probably not unconnected.



The Erongo Mountains after exceptional rains



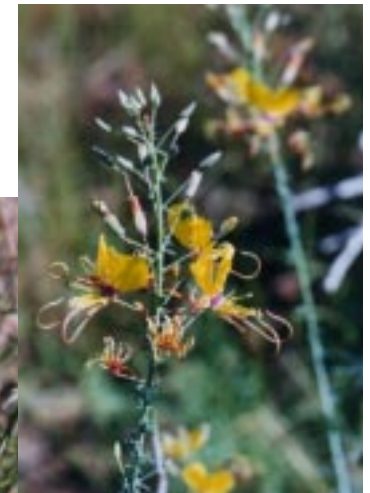
The Fat Tree is unique to Namibia



The Erongo mountains are not on the way to anywhere so when you get there, there is just you. We went there mainly to look at rock art because being a rocky area, there was a lot of it about. But it is an old place, probably the oldest place, they say, in the world and the plants there have been a long time evolving as they have evolved nowhere else, to cope with sun and rain and drought and heat and cold in extremes. In this place, at this time, at the end of spectacular rains, they were all in flower and leaf. A normally bare landscape of stones was covered green and flowering. We followed game tracks through places that may have seen another

human this year, or these last ten years, but probably not. We found a place where the water draining from a small plateau still surfaced here and there in these few weeks after the end of the rains, on its way falling down the granite hillside filling rockpools and waterfalls with cold silver water. Somewhat to the surprise of the quick breeding frogs that lived there, we swam. A cold hot dry wet desert swim.

There aren't many places left now where you can go away to the silence and the stars that have always been, to feel that you are just a small point in time in places changed by natural influences alone. So it was





reassuring to come home at the end of this year to find nature back home involved in a bid to reclaim the watermeadows of my childhood. The Somerset levels near here are, as they always used to be, under several feet of water, flooding caused now, however, as in Mozambique earlier in the year and in Tanzania two years ago, not so much by the natural order of things, but by the way people upstream had altered the capacity of the land to hold the water back.

By chance, while moving books when I was decorating the study, I came across a small book of poetry by Diana Jordan, a family friend and former Principal of Woolley Hall Training College in Yorkshire. It was a book published privately as a tribute after her death a quarter of a century ago. She too was a lover of wild places and had for many years, a croft on the west coast of Scotland, where she probably wrote this.

*We came back under the young May moon  
Came back round September, December, February  
Past the standing stones pointing the way  
To the holy places, where, when the gorse  
Flamed with hot scents, and the larks  
Shed their showering song over the salty grass,  
Came others, long, long ago bringing the news,  
Then, as this morning, the sea dazzled  
With blue and the roaring waves tossed  
their foam crests to the sun far far away  
on the great horizon. Then as now  
The ramparts of rock, men christened the wilderness  
Rose against the sea's restless breast  
And other men told of another wilderness  
Temptation and the devil's tongue,  
What did it signify in those days to men  
living here with eternity at their elbow?  
Not lost as we, in the fever of the present,  
In the race with today, in the fear of tomorrow  
Yet here, wind weather and tide still have the last word.  
As it was in the very beginning when this word  
Was God, then as now - Amen.*



The Dead Vlei