

Sat, 28 Jul 2007

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## JAY WALKING

**The hungry business of roadtripping**By *Jacqui Zurcher*

Posted Wed, 25 Jun 2003

We were about 8km outside Swellendam, on the edge of the wine lands when the hunger began to take hold. I remember saying, "I'm feeling a bit light-headed; maybe we should stop for breakfast..." And suddenly there was a sign — Cheese Shop 1km.



Niqui and I had spotted the sign at precisely the same moment. Simultaneously, we shot each other knowing looks; eyebrows raised, foreheads bobbing, pupils darting excitedly. Cheese. It must be genetic. Our family, as far back as we could recall, had a passion for the stuff. When a taste for something is so intimately coded into your DNA, what choice do you have when a specialist shop appears, oasis-like on a long journey?

Driving 1070km from Cape Town to East London along the Garden Route is hungry work. Sisters heading to their hometown to visit mom, bonded in purpose, united in a love for cheese.

Technically I hadn't done any of the driving by the time we came upon the Xairu Cheese and Coffee Shop beckoning us off the N2 just past Swellendam, but I was hungry all the same.

Turning off the wide road onto the gravel, I spotted a painted notice — Dog Run — at the entrance of a fenced off area of grass alongside the main building. Dogs rate up there with cheese as one of my favourite things. I suspected we had stumbled upon a quality establishment.

This was confirmed when the front doorway announced a menu for dogs, sporting a drawing of a dachshund and spaniel sipping a milkshake. Canine drinks were available in the aqua or dairy variety and snacks of pedigree pouches could be purchased in lamb gravy, beef, chicken or chicken and liver flavours at R4.20 per pouch. If I were a dog, I reckon lamb gravy would be the way forward.

After admiring the local Cheddars and Goudas we sat down in the restaurant and set about the task of ordering breakfast. Outside the glass sliding doors, the dew perched on the fields where the cows grazed and mountains

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*Leigh Robertson,*  
*Highlife Editor*

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arrested the horizon. If my throat hadn't been sore, I might have yodelled. To Niqui's immense relief I ordered the scrambled eggs, toast and coffee instead.

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During the course of our breakfast I struck up a conversation with Johan Barnard, the owner, who explained that the name of the restaurant, Xairu (pronounced Cairo) means paradise in the Khoisan language. Johan later showed us around the outside area he has set up for functions, with an impressive looking spit, wooden benches and decorative thorn trees.

By the time we got back into the car, I was determined to get out of the city more often. The fresh air, friendly people and hearty breakfast had me jotting down random reminders in my diary for the next few months to venture forth into the hinterland.

As we headed towards Heidelberg, we still had over 800km ahead of us. Fully caffeinated, I took the wheel cheerfully, the world seemed a charmed place.

A few hours and few hundred kilometres later, my butt was numb, the coffee had worn off and the hills of Heidelberg had disappeared. Storms River had us limping to the restroom, only to find the fake flowers looking withered and pitiful.

Our packed lunch, scorned as a potential breakfast in the face of competition from the cheese shop, was excavated on the unforgiving road to Humansdorp. The car was hot and our cheese and tomato sandwiches soggy. We ate them anyway.

The hours passed and we found ourselves driving on the infamous coastal road between Port Elizabeth and East London in the dark. Every 10 kilometres there used to be signboards declaring, 'Potholes for the next 10kms'. The legendary potholes seem to finally have given way to a newly resurfaced road, which is great. Unfortunately, someone forgot to paint on the road markings.

Driving in the pitch dark, on a winding road in the middle of the rural Eastern Cape without any road markings is not fun. You constantly worry about cattle wandering onto the road. You're tense. It's a challenge to simply follow the road and not fall off the edge. In this state, cars driving towards you, refusing to dim their brights, can provoke an unusually aggressive response. Minibus taxis cruising past at 160km/h and then screeching to a halt in front of you can elicit an equally disagreeable reaction.

By the time the East London airport loomed ahead, Niqui had banned me from ever driving in the dark. She was stern. There was no arguing. I could see where she was coming from. It didn't bring out the best in me.

It seems I am genetically disposed to short trips featuring mountains, cheese and dogs. Good to know.

*To visit Xairu, look out for the Cheese Shop sign on the N2 between Swellendam and Heidelberg. The restaurant and cheese shop can be found on the Rolandale farm. For more information contact Johan*

*Barnard at Xairu on (023) 512 3959*


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