

SITTING ON TOP OF THE WORLD

Norman McFarlane

The chilly October wind drives up the steep rocky slope as we trudge upward, ever upward – the bright green vineyards of Delvera Wine Estate falling away below us, the jagged crest of Klappmuts Kop seemingly static, coming no closer.

The party is strung out along the zig-zag contour path, each walker climbing at their own pace, some jaunty, chatty and energetic despite the steep slope, others clearly tired and out of breath, wishing the top and a well deserved respite was closer. The children by contrast, effortlessly dance ahead, chattering all the while, unfazed by the steep ascent.

It is late Saturday afternoon, and we're climbing Klappmuts Kop on the Delvera Wine Estate in the Stellenbosch Valley to enjoy the sunset over a picnic snack and a glass of bubbly.

The vegetation shifts as we gain height, morphing from vineyard, through a band of renosterveld to mountain fynbos, and then finally a tract of cool forest, close-growing trees providing shelter from the biting wind.

The path is well defined, yet still



PICTURE: NORMAN MCFARLANE

■ The sun slides into bed behind Lion's Head, watched closely by Table Mountain.

we take a wrong turn, but finally we emerge at the beacon, to be treated to a sweeping 360 degree vista of the winelands; the Taal Monument rearing into the sky points the way to Paarl, Agter Paardeberg and the Stellenbosch Valley off to one side, with Wellington a pale blue hint in

the distance.

Klappmuts seemingly at our feet, and the ant-like cars on the N1 to Paarl presage the Riebeck Valley and the Swartland in the distance, and looking right into the sunset, Plattekoof hills and off to the left, the Table Mountain massif domi-

nates the skyline.

Sitting atop the crest of the kopie in the teeth of the wind is challenging, foolhardy even, so most of us sit in the lee of the summit, popping upright periodically to take the odd photograph of the dying sun.

The chatter is desultory as we nibble the delightful treats in our snack-packs. Isn't it amazing how good the simplest of food tastes when your appetite is engendered by good healthy exercise?

The great shining copper-orb of the sun stalks the horizon, as the numerous farm-dams dwindle into the distance, reflecting the sky in hues of silver and beaten pewter.

More people arrive, a child's birthday party, a group of American tourists in awe of our winelands' grandeur despite the natural magnificence of their own country, a few family groups, all with a common goal: to salute Sol's descent into slumber. Yet, despite the volume of people it is strangely uncrowded.

As the sun slides towards the horizon, shadows soften, and the ever-so-brief period of dusk clears the air and brings the surrounding vistas into sharp focus, but alas the light is too low for a decent photo-

graph.

Conversation is subdued as the majesty of nature lulls us into an awed silence, punctuated by an ever vigilant mother's "Don't go where I can't see you!" to a wandering restless child. Appreciation for nature's glories it seems, comes later in life.

The sky is lit a deep orange-red, reflected in the distant wispy clouds. The colours shift and change, rearing up then slowly flattening out, dying as the sun vanishes leaching the last of the colour out of the heavens.

Far below, lights begin to twinkle in the valley, and headlights delineate the sinuous course of the N1, as streams of cars make their way back to the city to prepare for the coming work week.

In hushed voices, as if still in awe of the grandeur we have just witnessed, we call our party together, pack our bags after inspecting carefully for litter, and begin the trek back down.

It is easier going now, and the light is surprisingly good despite the sun being well below the edge of the world. The hillside echoes gently with exclamations of joy and exhilaration, of awed wonder at the sheer majesty of the sunset, and of intentions to come back once more.

A tired little girl clings sleepily to her daddy's back, as he gently urges her to hold on. As the light dies, a trail of torch-light fireflies comes alive, winding its way down the zig-zag contour path, as we make our way to the waiting vehicles for the return journey to our cars. It is dark by the time we get back to the Dirtopia Adventure Centre, the unfailingly cheerful staff there to thank us for our custom, and to wish us a safe journey home.

Pleasantly tired, but refreshed and renewed, ready to face the week ahead, we take the long road home to Somerset West, the memory of that breath-taking flaming spectacle as the sun sank into slumber, fading gently.

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