

The Ekeren Files

Volume 20 – December 2007

'The getting in shape'

Wouter: similar to last year, should be biking to work but still likes his bed too much in the morning, but will be starting soon because the 'good-enough' shape needs a boost.

Anita: 7th year revalidation training: this year with added value on a ski trainer.

Also this year we started doing bike trips in Antwerp and mountain biking in the Ardennes.

The trips in Antwerp are a lot of fun; we have a plan with numbered bicycle path-nodes: plan your trip in advance from node to node, write down the numbers and follow the arrows: very easy. We covered the whole province and discovered a lot of nice places and people. (Note: the bigger the house, the less friendly the people)

The mountain biking in the Ardennes was great this year. With Michel & Christian, two guys from the region, we did a lot of adventurous tours.

At the end of summer we were quite fit.

'The Snow'

16-23.12.2006: ISCHGL with hardly any snow! All the slopes have artificial snow from the snow cannons. No off-piste skiing but a lot of improvement of our technique on the slope. The snow was very hard and with our soft touring skis, things were getting a bit extreme : going down the slope at 60 km/h with fluttering skis is a very apart sensation, the nice feeling of loosing control...so: new skis for Anita! (Very nice competition slalom skis from stöckli) I didn't get new ones, I believe in a strong guardian angel!

03-11.03.2007: We cancelled our cross-country skiing holiday because I hurt my knee when I slid down a dike on a dive.

15-22.12.2007: ISCHGL with a LOT of snow! This week really made up for our missed trip in March. Absolutely fantastic! Virgin knee deep Champaign powder snow. Blue skies. Skiing was like drifting on top of the clouds!



'The Diving'

Anita: not.

Wouter: A lot!

Last year I was training for deep wreck dives; this year I'm doing them!

I joined the 'European Society for Shipwreck research'. With this group of very experienced divers, we've been exploring recently discovered wrecks in the North Sea, focusing on the 'Wilhelmina' a Dutch paddle steamer from 1895. A big wreck, standing upright on the seabed at 45 meters.

On the last day of the season we did a 'try-dive' on a place we found on a map: bingo! We discovered the wreck of a WW1 British cruiser at a depth of 47m. It's not identified yet, but we found gun shells which gave us the first indication. In April, we will start exploring it.

First week of July, I went with our Tec-diving team to Cornwall to do deep trimix dives. The whole week, the weather was so horrible, that we only managed to do 4 shallow test dives. One moment, we were kitted up and ready to jump from the boat, as a gale warning came in! Dive cancelled and quickly to port where the rescue boats were already towing in the small sailing boats. With reason: nice thunderstorm!

Well, the diving was not so great, but the tents were big enough and there were three cooks in the team. Big fun after all. Oh yes, my small Citroën van decided to go on strike so I was flown out of Cornwall to Brussels and was driven home in a big BMW limousine. Good insurance!

Last week of November, Red Sea, Egypt. Again on board of the M.Y. Obsession. Deep wreck penetration with rebreathers and underwater scooters. We've all been pushing our limits! Deeper dives (84m), long dives up to 160 minutes with standby

teams for emergencies. We're getting ready for the real stuff.



'The working'

Part 1: the working in the Ardennes

Two big achievements this year: The laundry room and the lighting.

We put a kitchen from IKEA in the laundry room and it's wonderful. Anita keeps raving about the extra storage room she has now and how pretty it looks. It's also the hub from where the network cables for the internet start: from this year we have broadband internet in the house. At last the southern part of Belgium is hooked up to the world. This also means that Anita can work from the Ardennes. She never has to stop working now. And working means money... oh yes, you need lots of it when you start flipping through design lighting catalogues. But to be honest : it looks very nice and it doesn't hurt that much if you keep telling yourself that it is an investment....next 'investment' will be a burglar

alarm.



Part 2: the working at work

Anita is doing a terrific job at VCD. She gets the business rolling, but unfortunately her assistants can't roll as fast as her. In April, the first one leaves the company. No hard feelings, he didn't live up to Anita's standards anyway (but hey, who does...except me of course... I'm used to think around corners) OK, after one month: the next one! Well this is a really nice man...a bit too nice for hard IT-sales. So after a few months: bye, bye! OK next one. Phone call on his first working day: "sorry, but I don't come, I've found another job somewhere else." Well this was not very nice; you don't find assistants in the groceries shop. OK next round of candidates and job interviews. Finally after two months, Rietje, a fine lady from Eindhoven joins Anita's team and so far, things are looking very good and we believe she's a winner.

As a result of this coming and going, Anita had to run the business almost all by herself. This meant a lot of work and a lot of stress.

Nevertheless, the results of her business-unit are fantastic; all targets are met with a disgusting over score! The months of labour will pay of in a fat bonus that exceeds the one of her manager! I'm very proud of my little girl! (and not only because of the money)

At the fire station at BASF, things have changed quite a bit for me. I'm no longer part of the ambulance crew anymore. I'm now expert for high angle rescue which means that if anyone has to be evacuated from a high position, I will be able to give the necessary input to organise things. The courses I have to take for this are really big fun! We have a new toy: a 42 meter elevator, 'Bronto' on a big



Volvo truck. I'm one of the instructors for it. After a month training I already have a lot of hands-on experience how NOT to do certain things: DON'T dip the basket into the dock water! DON'T try to turn the truck if there is still part of it inside the garage! DON'T try to park on a spot where there is already something parked...Well, if you don't try, you'll never know.

In between things I'm still renting out safety materials. A nice job with 2 motivated colleagues and a big turnover (258 000 euros in December only).

I still think of it as a very nice job.

Part 3: the working in the other houses

We are still focusing on the Ardennes, so apart from installing central heating in the working house in Ekeren, nothing much happened; although I started a big cleanup to get rid of all the rubbish that started to pile up. (and yes Anita, I know it was about time I did it, so stop....)

'In Memoriam'

While I was writing this letter, Johan, my brother called me to tell me that Maria, his wife, died. We only knew for 3 weeks that she had an incurable form of cancer and we're really shocked of the speed everything happened. Blondie, that's how everybody called her, was a very kind lady who deserved a much better fate than this.



After 16 years, Spotje, the dog and best friend of Anita's parents, died of old age.

'The Friends & the Family'

Christmas 2006: We chopped down a 25m high pine tree in the forest and took the upper 6 meter into the living room for our Christmas tree. Big Fun!



The Kiwi's are coming! : Tina, Paul, Alan, Lyn, Kathryn, Graeme and last but not least Pat came all the way north to visit us ! And yes, we dragged them around the countryside! And yes, rain came down in buckets when we were on a hill with no shelter! And oh boy, it was slippery going down, wasn't it, Pat?

Flash message!

*Watch out! There is a new terrorist on the internet. Apparently, she looks like a nice elderly lady but when she comes near a computer, she turns into the wicked hacker who shreds your system into bits and pieces by a few clicks of the mouse! She even managed to cut the power from a small village in the Ardennes for more than 12 hours. Local authorities are still searching for her, but until now without any result. The only clue they found so far are the two mysterious symbols at the end of each message: **PD***

End of flash message

By the way, during her stay in the Ardennes, **Pat Dobie** learned how to surf on the internet and to send emails....



Also our 'regular' guests from Germany, England and Holland paid us a visit this year. The choice we made to install a bar in the living room rather than a library, proved to be a very good one...

The Cat

Gaston just had his food, sits at the window looking outside and finally learned not to walk on the keyboard while I'm typinsdfjgdjfglkqj. (Well most of the time he doesn't)



The Team

The team is still doing very well and has a lot of exciting plans of which we will tell in our next letter.



That's it for now!

Hugs & kisses from,

Anita, Wouter & Gaston

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