

# The Ekeren Files

Volume 25 – December 2012

## 'The getting in shape'

The walking holiday in La Reunion in 2011 was a very nice way to get in shape. In 2012 apart from Anita who takes her bicycle to go shopping nothing much happened on the physical training side of life.

This didn't bother us too much because our minds are quite in shape now. Anita stopped taking her happy pills and with the last mindfulness-training in January, we closed the depression chapter.

## 'The Snow'

Our yearly trip to Ischgl, Austria was a bit different. As always, we followed skiing-lessons and after about 20 years of taking lessons, we are in the group with the highest level. I can tell you now that there can be different levels in the highest level...and that our level this year was lower than the level of some other students...and that after one day, the students with our level decided not to come back in our group, so the next 5 days were very interesting.

We're very fond of the black slopes now....skiing on those was always a moment of relaxation in between the deep snow off-piste descents. morning routine was the test of the avalanche beeper.

It was hard work, but we enjoyed it very much.



View from our balcony

## 'The working'

### Part 1: the working in the Ardennes

A last, at last, at last...the shower in the bathroom is as good as ready. Only a few minor (but annoyingly persistent) leaks have to be fixed. Not bad after almost 3 years. Now the waiting is for the 2 stone washbasins...

We contacted a painter and she came to look, she went, and we didn't hear of her ever since...no answer when we call or mail her, nothing...

The forrest isn't a forrest anymore. More and more trees started to fall with or without help from the wind, so the time was ripe to cut and sell them. This brings in enough money to plant new trees. We look forward to see it growing. Follow the link to see the movie <http://youtu.be/st1uVXFP9a4>

Our family friend, Wim, moved into the house and is now following a beekeeper schooling and has prepared 2 beehives. I hope you like honey.

### Part 2: the working at work

Anita : business is low this year and Anita reduced her working time to 4/5<sup>th</sup>. We have to plan in 80 days off now....1 trip of 4 weeks, one of 3, one week

skiing and the 2 months leftover in the Ardennes..

Ok, we can manage. And we spent 3 wonderful days at the lovely island of Schiermonnikoog for the companies' 35 years celebration.

Wouter : busy with streamlining a program to rent out safety equipment at our fire station warehouse. Too much thinking, too little action. This year is my 25<sup>th</sup> year at BASF. We went to the traditional company celebration, where Anita had to take the honour to get the thank you letter from our company director because my toilet timing was a bit unlucky. (when you got to go, you got to go...)

### Part 3: the working in the other houses

With the toyota on the driveway, the place became a bit full and those old landcruisers rust to pieces if you let them out in our Belgian weather. We tore down the old garage and built a nice new one which is a lot bigger and higher and even the neighbours like it because we got rid of the asbestos roof.

Because we rent our apartments to a social organisation, a lot of the investments are subsidized by the government; insulating the attic of 50m<sup>2</sup> cost us only 60 euro's including labour. Even the materials alone cost more than that.

We also had the path and stairs to the front door replaced. The tenants are happy and so are we.

## 'The Driving and other nice things in life'

My wreckdiving career is over. I enjoyed it for more than 10 years and had several great adventures involving National Geographic, film crews, expeditions, radio interviews, exotic locations...but also dying people and near misses because our diving was really at the edge, trips where Anita couldn't come because of too dangerous, cancelled trips because of bad weather/bad boat/wrong information...I started asking myself: "Am I still

having fun or am I doing this because it is part of the 'adventure'? " Well I've done some thinking and from now on only warm holiday dives together with Anita. Malta : here we come ! one week technical training dives while Anita drives to all the nice spots on the island. Malta has a lot of history and nowadays it has the atmosphere of faded glory. We had a good time.

From diving to dRiving. 2 April, our group of 4WD enthusiasts assembled near Malaga, southern Spain and the next morning we took the ferry to Tanger, Morocco for a 3 week trip through the country. The weather was fine and the people were fun and life was good until I found out that I left the car documents on my desk at home...all of them. Trying to get into an African country without the necessary papers is not my favourite pastime (apart from that time at the Swaziland border, when I had the passport of the cameraman in my pocket, but that's another story), so on exiting the ferry and driving to the morocco border control, I didn't feel very relaxed (=understatement). There are two kinds of custom officials : the ones who play exactly by the book and a bit more, and you have the more relaxed type, who are happy to accept a pen from you and wish you 'bon voyage' after putting all the necessary stamps in your passport. Those 2 kind were present at this border crossing and luckily I could lure the relaxed type to our truck. I let him have a look into the fridge and said 'no' when he asked if I had a gun and that was it. No papers asked..."Lucky bastard !" was the comment of our guide. From then on, Morocco was a fantastic adventure. It's a beautiful country with very friendly people (most of them). Our caravane of 10 big 4WD trucks attracted every kid in every village we passed. And every kid in every village knows one phrase in French : "donne moi stylo !" (give me pen). Our standard answer was

"why ?" except for the people in the deep south, who didn't ask anything and lived in a hole near the river. We gave them our high energy emergency rations. We didn't feel too good when we saw their poverty compared to our luxury...

One day, we were driving on the atlantic beach near the mauretanium border. We spotted a battleship a few kilometres away from shore. When we saw smoke from the ship and lightflashes and the sound of explosions from the directions we were driving, followed by a flyby from an armed helicopter, we knew we were bound to drive into trouble. And yes, 30 minutes later, an army patrol intercepted us and we had to follow them toward their command post. Luckily, they were just having manoeuvres and after the exchange of beer against sausages, we were allowed to continue our journey along another track. The following days we followed the dried riverbed of the Draa-river along the Algerian border. It is there that we had Morocco changed in MoROCKo. Kilometer after kilometer of rocky tracks. It really gets on your nerves and rattles loose every bit of your car that is supposed to stay in place. And at last at the end of our ordeal awaited the 'Erg Chegaga'. The sanddunes we know from the paris-dakar rally. This was what we were waiting for. Driving through the dunes is among the nicest things you can do with a car...digging a 3-ton truck out of the sand is a bit less fun. Jumping over the top of a dune is really scary when you didn't mean to but miscalculated your speed.



From there, we worked our way up north again through the mountains which on some places gives you the feeling to be in the Himalayas. Impressive ! After three weeks, we set foot on European soil again and went home with a lot of good memories.

The truck is very well equipped for travelling, but is less suitable for playing around in the forests of the Ardennes...so look what I found in an old warehouse



Since it was only April and the most of the year still had to come, we couldn't resist to the call of the desert and in the autumn we steered our landcruiser towards Tunisia. Apart from some armoured cars in

the city of Tunis, the country has a very 'business as usual' atmosphere after the revolution and the drive towards the Sahara was quite uneventful. Oh no, that's not true. When passing a dates orchard, we stopped to have a look because it was picking season and the dates were ripe. The very friendly owner wouldn't let us go without a little present : a whole bunch of dates = 5 kilos !! quite a different experience compared to Morocco. Very friendly people ! To get to the Sahara, we had to cross the 'Chott El-Jerid' dry salt lake. That was really rock & roll. Watch the video ! [http://youtu.be/sR3y8LIL\\_zg](http://youtu.be/sR3y8LIL_zg) For driving in the desert, we were assisted by local guides who also took care of the catering: every morning fresh bread baked in the embers of the campfire. a whole week driving through the sanddunes was fantastic. The group of people we were together with was really fun and we had a very nice holiday. To be repeated...

### **'The Friends & the Family'**

The 'regulars' visited us again in the Ardennes and also new friends like Patrick & Tanja and the whole 4WD bunch (we now drive off-road to the petrol station and supermarket).

Pauline, the girl next door, had her 13<sup>th</sup> birthday party in the Ardennes with 5 girls from her school. Giggle, giggle....

Anita's dad has been around for 80 years now and we had a quiet party with the family.

Anita's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday's party was a bit less quiet...15 bottles of wine (of which 11 were drunk by 6 people), one broken ankle (don't try to catch your wife when she falls! Let her go !), one car hitting the gate of the emergency entrance of the nearest hospital ("of course I'm sober enough to drive"), one

stiff knee (chairs are not for dancing...), some hangovers, one angry neighbours' daughter ("mum, I'm ashamed of you!!!") and a lot of happy memories....

### **'The Cat'**

Gaston has been on a diet and lost some weight. But he tries to compensate by keeping a hidden stash...



### **'The Team'**

The team is stronger than ever ! We are very much aware that we have a fantastic life and we plan to keep it that way !

That's it for now!

Hugs & kisses from,

Anita, Wouter & Gaston

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