

Patricia Glyn

“FOOTING WITH SIR RICHARD’S GHOST”

Between March and July 2005, Patricia walked 2 200 kilometres from Durban to the Victoria Falls. The journey shadowed that of her adventurer ancestors, Sir Richard Glyn and his brother Robert who came to Africa in 1863 because they’d just read David Livingstone’s account of “The Smoke That Thunders” and wanted both to see this mighty cascade and to hunt Africa’s big game.

Using Richard’s diary about the old party’s trip, Patricia found and walked their route along the great river systems of South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe, often on back roads, sometimes crashing through the bush and completely unarmed in Big Five territory. When her ancestors’ wagons moved, so did she, where they stopped for provisions, so did she – eventually reaching The Falls on exactly the same day as they had, 142 years later.

The talk highlights how much our continent has changed in the century-and-a-half between these expeditions. Wildlife has been shot out in some parts, our rivers dammed and our people no longer living with their culture and power intact. But like that of her forebears, Patricia’s story is about reaching her destination through the kindness and hospitality of Africa’s rural people.

It’s also the story of her little dog, Tapiwa, who walked with her and that of the puppy they found dying on the side of the road in Botswana. It’s a tale about personal development as the woman who could hardly read a map learned how to navigate by GPS co-ordinates and lead her two-person back-up team through the thirst land on the peripheries of the Kalahari Desert. It’s about travelling on foot through politically unstable Zimbabwe; it’s about the crew’s near disasters, their highs, their lows and the wonder of camping in the great African outdoors. It’s a tale about meeting challenges, facing fear and being rewarded with great insights and even greater peace. The presentation is brutally honest, extremely funny in places and deeply moving.

It also has a strong conservation message and demonstrates the great health benefits of walking, as this 46 year old woman managed the tremendous physical task of slaving through thick sand and thorn veld for 35 kilometres per day.

The hour-and-a-quarter-long presentation is illustrated by magnificent slides (a distillation of 8 000 taken on the trip!) and wonderful video footage because the journey was filmed for an international television documentary. It is inspirational, entertaining and thought-provoking.