

Going to the World Angus Forum?

Based on their South Africa visit, one Angus couple predicts an amazing experience.

by **Troy Smith**

The 2005 World Angus Forum is especially appealing to Greg and Deb Jorgensen. No strangers to the host country of South Africa, the couple vacationed there a few years ago. They have friends there, including Angus breeders whose operations will be included in the 2005 forum tours. Greg and Deb have often talked about a return visit, and the forum provides a strong temptation.

"South Africa is a beautiful country. I'd go again in a minute," grins Deb, as Greg nods in agreement.

Alas, it is not to be. The demands of their Ideal, S.D., farming and ranching operation won't allow it. Not now, at least. For one thing, the World Angus Forum will be in March, and that's calving time at Jorgensen Land and Cattle Co.

Greg and Deb eagerly encourage Angus enthusiasts planning to make the journey,



and they have volunteered to share from their memory book, offering a peek at the South African experience.

International Angus

For the Jorgensens, it started with a long period of travel from Sioux Falls, S.D., to Minneapolis, Minn., to Amsterdam, Netherlands, and on to Johannesburg, South Africa. The couple logged more than 50 hours, including time between flights, but it was worth it.

In Johannesburg, Greg and Deb were met by their friend, Brian Angus, and his family. It's an appropriate surname, since Angus raises registered and commercial Angus cattle. Coincidentally, he is one of the breeders responsible for organizing the 2005 forum. His operation, Woodview Farms, will be included in the tours. The Jorgensens met Angus years ago while he

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF GREG & DEB JORGENSEN

► It took more than 50 hours to get from South Dakota to South Africa. Deb and Greg Jorgensen made the trip in 2001.





►The coastal city of Cape Town was established as a port by Dutch colonists in 1652.

Their friend arranged for Greg and Deb to tour the sights of Johannesburg, the hub of South Africa's gold-mining industry, and the historic city of Cape Town. Located near the southern tip of the African continent, Cape Town was established as a port by Dutch colonists in 1652. Greg says it developed into a manufacturing center and a popular resort area.

"We took several tours of the city and nearby towns and villages, including a helicopter ride for a view of the tip of the cape," Greg says. "They say the rough

waters off the cape — the roughest anywhere in the world — have caused more than 2,000 shipwrecks."

Leaving the coastal plain, the Jorgensens traveled through mountainous regions and areas where banana plantations and other fruit-growing operations are the dominant form of agriculture. Beyond that is the interior plateau, where the majority of South Africa's livestock is produced. They visited Mequatling Land and Cattle Co., owned by the Philip Barnard family, another

was pursuing his agricultural education in the United States.

"We met him back in 1981. He spent time at our place as an intern," Deb explains. "Several years later, we were reunited with Brian and his wife, Maria, while attending the World Angus Forum in Alberta, Canada. It was after their repeated invitations that we finally visited them."



►Most of the cattle consume a forage-based diet throughout their lives, so much of South Africa's beef is grass-fed.

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— Deb Jorgensen

Angus operation included in the 2005 forum tours.

“At Barnard’s and Brian’s operations we saw some good cattle, featuring Angus genetics from the U.S.,” Greg reports. “Their livestock and crop production is more labor-intensive. Labor is cheap, and they don’t have big, modern machinery. They cultivate their fields with small equipment — maybe 40-horse tractors, 8-foot discs and two- or three-bottom plows. Typical crops include winter wheat and corn (maize), but the corn was planted in 80-inch rows.”

Located about 200 miles from the coast, at about 6,000 feet (ft.) above sea level, Angus’ Woodview Farms encompasses some 8,000 hectares, or about 19,750 acres. A semi-arid, rolling plain, the area averages less than 20 inches (in.) of rainfall annually. Greg witnessed the application of lime to temper the acidic soil, but there is little use of commercial chemicals in crop production.

“We didn’t see any ‘no-till’ farming. The producers I talked to weren’t familiar with those practices, but they were very interested and asked a lot of questions,” Greg adds.

Most of the land is devoted to grazing cattle and sheep. Woodview Farms runs more than 1,000 cows and close to 5,000 ewes over large areas of native range and improved pastures. As with crops, livestock production depends on ample, low-cost labor. Many of Woodview’s 50 employees are herders who live in small huts located in the grazing areas, near the groups of cattle and sheep for which those workers are responsible. Some hay is produced, but animals graze nearly year-round. Very few are kept and fed in confinement, so cattle are grass-fattened.

South African living

Greg says South African producers must contend with widely fluctuating prices. The country does not have a highly developed infrastructure for marketing and processing livestock, so markets are more localized.

“Buyers come to the farms to negotiate

for what they want to buy,” Greg says. “And I understand that meat processors are mostly small, fairly local operations.”

Deb also saw evidence of a more localized food marketing structure in the grocery stores she visited.

“It was a little like stepping back in time, to when the stores in the U.S. were small and depended on local suppliers,” Deb says. “They had what we would think of as an old-time butcher who cut meat to order. I saw no prepackaged or name-brand meat products. They sold mostly fresh fruits and vegetables, and the baked goods appeared to be produced locally. I didn’t see any of the promotional displays or advertising that we are accustomed to seeing in our supermarkets.”

Of course, a trip to Africa wouldn’t be complete without seeing wildlife. Greg and Deb accomplished that through a visit to Kruger National Park. Roughly 80 miles wide by 200 miles long, the huge animal reserve covers an area nearly one-third the size of their home state of South Dakota.

“The giraffes were our favorite, but I



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think the only (species) we didn’t see was rhinoceros. It was amazing,” Deb recalls. “The people who go to South Africa for the World Angus Forum will have the opportunity to see amazing sights that we want to see again. I wish we could go with them.”

