



Team Journal – Day 9

Friday 31st March

As noted yesterday we were being guided around the two battle sites in reverse order so today was the turn of Isandlwana (sometimes written Isandhlwana). We had an early breakfast; since we were leaving straight after lunch we had to be packed and breakfasted by 7.30. We woke to heavy mist, but by the time that we left this was already lifting with just some tendrils hanging in the valleys. It was going to be another gorgeous, hot day.



We stopped on the way, about 10 miles from the ground over which the battle had been fought, for a briefing. David Rattray refers to Isandlwana as 'the greatest defeat Britain ever suffered during her Imperial history' and although one suspects the name of Rorke's Drift is better known (because of the number of Victoria Crosses won and, perhaps, the film Zulu) it was here that the main action took place on the 22nd January 1879.



We then went up to the bluff over which the Zulu army had charged down into the British camp. Here Robert Caskie sketched out the geography of the battlefield - with the Sphinx-shaped hill at its centre. It was this hill which had so spooked the British soldiers - because they carried a facsimile of the sphinx on their cap badges following their part in the defeat of Napoleon in Egypt.



The sphinx-shaped Isandlwana (meaning 'little house' according to Rob - but other translations exist)

Then, seated in chairs on the shoulder of the hill, we were given a blow by blow description of the battle from Robert. The most memorable feature of the battlefield is the scattering of white-painted stone cairns which mark where the bodies of the British (mainly Welsh) soldiers were buried where they fell in groups of 8 or more. After the lecture some of the more adventurous team members set out to walk to the top of the hill. It was at this point that we had our own Welsh casualty when Richard Jeens (in the manner of Jack with his pail of water and companion Jill) slipped on his way down and suffered some minor cuts and bruises (but no broken crown) - flip flops, it turns out, were not the ideal footwear for the task. The team doctor leapt into action, for the first time this tour, and pronounced, a little laconically perhaps, that all would be well.



Some members of the team follow Richard's descent down Isandlwana with a critical eye.

We then returned to the Lodge for lunch before setting out for our next stop, Little Switzerland, in the Drakensburgs, 100 miles or so to the west. 100 miles closer to Bloemfontein and the start of shooting on Monday.



The team examines the cave halfway up the hill where an injured British soldier was placed by his companions and from where he directed fire upon the attacking Zulus below (no happy ending for him, I'm afraid).