

University of the Third Age Plettenberg Bay

Newsletter February 2023

Dear Members

Our annual general meeting will be on the 15th March. The AGM business matters should be concluded in less than 15 minutes. Our keynote speaker, Case Rijsdijk, will talk to us about 'The very early universe'.

As David and Judy Yuill have resigned from the committee after four years of service we are looking for new committee members. We hope you will consider becoming part of the team.

Thank you to those who have paid their 2023 membership subscription fees. Please note that payments for 2023 membership subscriptions are due before 31 March. Membership runs from 1 January to 31 December. The 2023 fees are R200 per person.

Please remember to wear your name tags to all of our meetings and events, so that we can easily recognise you. The colour of the 2023 name tags is yellow. If you have paid up but have not yet received your name tags please collect them from Judy Yuill at our next Monday meeting. Don't forget that you can attend the meetings of any other South African U3A branch free of charge if you wear your Plett u3a name tag.

Information regarding our future events is provided in a separate document, which is sent out together with the monthly newsletter. The programme document consists of (1) a calendar for the next two months and (2) overviews of future events. Please let us know if you have any suggestions for the year ahead.

Best wishes
Plett u3a committee

Welcome

A very warm welcome to our new members: Clyde and Maré Campbell; Lynese Cooke; Petro Erasmus; Jane Evans; Sally and Paul Falla; Gail Farrenkothen; Diana and John Grout; Carol Hubert; Marialena and Robert Moni; Jenny Ponder; Colette Powell; Megan Stobard; Sandi Tomlinson; Mary Tyrrel; Lorna van der Merwe; Shirley van Niekerk; Renée and Gideon van Zyl; Karen Ward; Nadine Watt; Guy White and Wei Zhao.

Plett u3a events programme

Please note that the calendar of upcoming events is sent as a separate document together with the newsletter. Overviews of future events are included in the calendar document. More detailed information regarding future talks and outings is sent to all members as 'Upcoming events' email notifications about two weeks prior to the event. A reminder is sent approximately 24 hours before the event. Outings need to be booked through u3aplett@gmail.com.

Annual General Meeting, 15 March 2023

Please don't miss this event. The business part of the meeting will be over in 15 minutes maximum (says our Chairman). Refreshments (tea, coffee, sandwiches and pastries) will be served. Our keynote speaker, renowned astronomer Case Rijsdijk, will explore 'The very early universe' to address the following questions: Where have we come from? Where are we going? How do we know?

Past activities

Francesco's Mediterranean Voyage, a 12-part BBC Television documentary series, was first aired in 2008. The Venetian architect Francesco da Mosto follows the historical Venetian trading route from Venice to Istanbul, sailing as a crew member of the yacht *Black Swan*.

Monday 6 February: Episodes 1 and 2

E1 – Arrivederci, Venezia
After meeting the crew of the *Black Swan* and some chaotic packing, Francesco introduces us to his ancestors in his own palace in Venice and then visits the Doge's Palace for reminders of the greatest age of Venice, when its empire covered half of the Mediterranean. He celebrates his last night with his family on his boat in St Mark's Basin at the Redentore Festival.





E2 – Istria and Split

As they set sail, Francesco hoists the Venetian flag after a nerve-wracking climb to the topmost mast. At the first stop in Pula, Croatia, he visits one of the largest Roman amphitheatres and a flat built into the Temple of Augustus. He tries to find the keeper of the key to the church in Beram village, to see the extraordinary fresco of the Dance of Death. The yacht stops over at the isolated lighthouse of Porer before reaching the city of Split, dominated by the huge palace of Diocletian. After his death the palace was immediately – and continues to be - occupied by squatters. Before they leave Split Francesco and the crew get to play in the sea the game of Picigin, seemingly a cross between volley ball and football.

Monday 13 February: Episodes 3 and 4

E3 · Bosnia and Dubrovnik

First stop is the Mostar bridge, a reconstructed 16th century Ottoman bridge in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The original bridge stood for 427 years before it was destroyed in 1993 during the Croat-Bosniak War. Young men risk their lives and leap from the 24 m high bridge to prove their manhood. After sailing to the Croatian islands of Hvar and Korcula, we arrive in the walled city of Dubrovnik and hear a first-hand-hand account of the shelling of the city during the 1993 war.



E4 · Montenegro and Albania

On entering the Bay of Kotor ancient Venetian sailors knew they were leaving safe waters for the dangers of pirates, ships of rival powers and dangerous seas. The crew stops off at the church of Santuario della madonna della Scarpello with an offering to the Virgin Mary to pray for a safe journey. Francesco explores a shipwreck, meets Miss Montenegro and visits Tirana, the capital of Albania, where mayor Edi Rama has ordered the colourful painting of many old grey Soviet-style buildings. He also visits the pirate fortress town of Ulcinj.



Monday 20 February: Episodes 5 and 6



E5 Corfu and Greece

As the *Black Swan* enters Greek waters, the mainsail tears in half and they limp into the port of Corfu. Corfu has more reminders of British rule (60 years) than Venetian (over 400 years). Francesco is drawn into a game of cricket and then walks through the British (almost botanical) Garden Cemetery. He feasts on the produce of the largest olive farm (over 800 000 trees). Together with David Bellamy he explores the island's countryside, described by Gerald Durrell in his book *My Family and other animals*.



E6 The Gulf of Corinth

After squeezing under the Rio Antirio bridge and through the narrow Corinth Canal the *Black Swan* sails towards Athens. Francesco stops off at Mount Parnassus to see the mystical site of the Oracle at Delphi, where he and the crew enjoy their own version of the Pythian games. He visits Metereon, the oldest and largest of the hilltop monasteries at Meteora.



In Athens at the Parthenon Francesco points out the damage caused by cannon balls. The sacred temple (built in 447 BC) remained intact until it was destroyed by a Venetian bomb in 1687 (then occupied by Turks) when the Venetians fought to regain control of the Eastern Mediterranean trade routes from the Ottoman Empire.

Monday 27 February: Episodes 7 and 8

E7 Badlands – The Peloponnese

Francesco heads off on motorbike into the wild west of Greece, the Peloponnese, to experience the extraordinary acoustics of the ancient Greek theatre at Epidaurus. Still in use today, this is the 'mother of Greek [and all Western] theatre'. He rides through Arcadia to Mystra (formerly 'Florence of the East') the ruined Byzantine town. Vathia is an uninhabited town of towers that were built as fortresses against neighbours, who fought each other endlessly. The Venetian seaside fortress of Methoni ('The eyes of Venice') fell to the Turks in 1500.



E7 The Cyclades or White Islands

Francesco visits the mystical Greek islands known as the Cyclades. First stop is Delos, full of temples built by an ancient civilisation that predated Ancient Greece, where he encounters the great phalli of Dionysus. On Tinos, he meets a woman who crawls on hands and knees for a kilometre uphill to give thanks to the icon of the Virgin Mary for the recovery of her sick husband. At Naxos ('Little Venice' was ruled by the Venetians 1207-1537) he visits an Italian family in a house built during that period. Santorini, a volcanic island, is believed by some to be the site of the lost city of Atlantis. Half of the island was submerged when the volcano erupted in approximately 1620 BC.



More about the *Black Swan*



The majestic sailing yacht *Black Swan* was launched in 1989 in Gosport, England by the builders Camper and Nicholson. She has a length of 40.5 m, a beam of 6.18m and a draft of 4.1m. Built with teak/oak frames hull, a wood superstructure and teak decks, the *Black Swan* comfortably cruises at 10 knots. She was designed by Charles E. Nicholson, commissioned by Major Selwin Calvery and christened *Brynhild*. For many years she sailed under the name *Changrilla* before turning into the *Black Swan*. She underwent major restoration in Italy in 2000-2002. Early in her career she won her share of races including the King's Cup, His Majesty's Cup, the Squadron King's Cup and the Town Cup. In 2003, following her restoration, she participated in classic ship races. *Black Swan* works in the upscale charter trade in the Mediterranean with a professional crew of six. She can accommodate ten guests in five cabins. If you're looking for a luxury yacht vacation in the Mediterranean you can charter the *Black Swan* for Euro 42 000 (approximately $ 45 000) per week, plus expenses.

Wednesday, 15 February: talk by Stan Harman – Air traffic control in Hong Kong

Stan gave a fascinating talk on his life as an air traffic controller, starting with his experiences in Zimbabwe, Jan Smuts (now OR Tambo) Airport, the Sultanate of Oman (during the period of the Gulf War, when up to 70 planes launched from an aircraft carrier could suddenly appear unannounced on the radar screen) to Hong Kong's Kai Tak and Chep Lap Kok (CLK) airports. CLK is the new Hong Kong International Airport. A large part of Stan's work was teaching and training on the job. It takes about five years to become fully qualified as an ATC. Stan spent his final years at CLK (the world's busiest cargo gateway and one of the world's busiest passenger airports) working as an En Route Supervisor and Examiner and was responsible for a crew of 14 controllers, as well as running the control centre. Stan retired to Plettenberg Bay in 2021.

The Kai Tak, or heart attack, airport received its moniker for good reason. Pilots had to be specially trained and certified to be able to make nightmarish landings between mountains and high-rise buildings. Coming in for the landing over Hong Kong with views into the high-rise apartments, pilots had to aim for a checker board on a mountain side and then make a 47 degree turn for the final approach onto a runway subject to crosswinds. Major wind changes could result in controllers having to change the runway approach direction. These factors, as well as low clouds, forced many pilots to have missed landings. Some landings ended unhappily, when wind shears caused planes to grind their engine and wing end into the runway. A major accident occurred at Chep Lap Kok airport when China Airlines Flight 642 crashed on 22 August 1999 while landing during a typhoon. It touched down hard, flipped over and caught fire. Of the 315 people on board, 312 survived.

To ensure maximum safety CLK has a fully equipped spare control tower, in the event of any disaster befalling the operational tower. Air traffic controllers and pilots have benefitted enormously from new technologies that allow a lot of information (such as lateral and vertical distances) to be communicated by computers directly from planes to the control tower, as well as to other planes.

Air traffic controllers may be fortunate in not having to take their work home, but they cannot afford to lose their concentration whilst working. When accidents occur controllers can be taken to court for manslaughter and can be made liable for damage. This is not a job for the faint-hearted.





Outings

Tuesday 21 February 2023: Keurbooms River - Ferry trip and picnic

After an inauspicious start to the day of grey-purple clouds and a rain shower the sun broke through to create perfect weather for our ferry trip. As we meandered upstream into the Keurbooms River Nature Reserve through the gorge with fascinating geological formations covered in Afromontane forests, Russell, our captain, provided an engaging running commentary on the river and its ecology, pointing out specific species of birds, plants and trees. After 5km we stopped at a natural beach for our picnic and a short forest walk. It was a wonderful excursion and many of us could have stayed there the whole day, seemingly far removed from civilisation, enjoying a special part of paradise.





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