u3a Plettenberg Bay

Newsletter
August 2023



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Contact us
https://plettu3a.org.za

Spring is (almost) here!

Plants are starting to push out tender pale green leaves but the temperatures here are often still decidedly chilly, especially when it's windy - except for the odd days of berg wind when we suddenly have temperatures around 30 degrees.

Before we head into the season of new growth we took a moment to reflect on how Plett u3a has being doing so far this year. In addition to counting heads at our events, we always welcome your direct feedback on this topic.

Don't miss our September talks on digital marketing and altruistic transcendence.

Please remember to use our website programme calendar to find out about our forthcoming events.

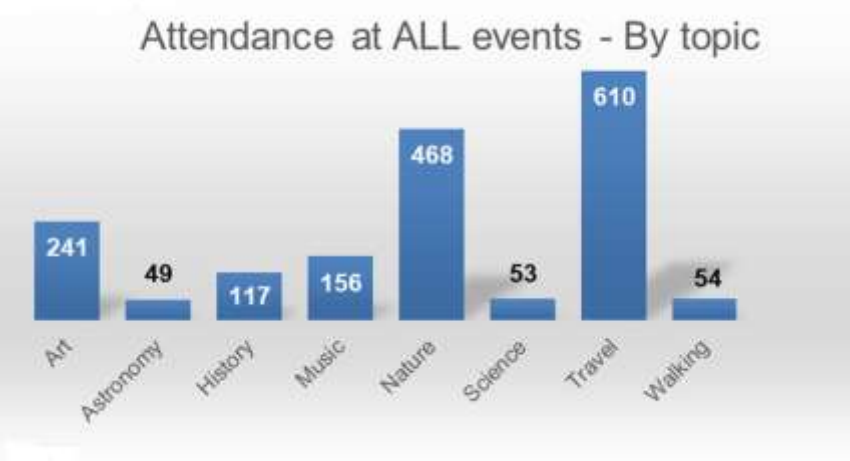
Best wishes,
Plett u3a committee

Welcome

A very warm welcome to our new members: Elaine Bressman, David Collett, Doug and Marianne Sutherland and Denise Gennison.

How is Plett u3a doing?

As Plett u3a operates for only ten months of the year (February - November) it seemed a good idea to conduct a half-year review of what we've been doing and whether it's working.



February – July 2023

As at the end of July 2023 we had 180 members, of which 55 joined as new members this year. We had 40 events, of which 33 were 'passive', meaning people sat and watched the Monday documentaries and/or listened to Wednesday talks. Seven of the events were 'active', being walks and outings, such as the Keurbooms ferry trip, watching bronze being poured, wine tasting, the Sutherland trip, and so on. During the first six months of this year we had a total of 1748 attendances at our events, of which 1537 were at the Monday documentaries and Wednesday talks and 211 joined us on our outings. Some of our members are very regular attendees at most events.

What interests you? The top five subjects of interest are travel, nature, art, music and history. During July at our meetings three boxes were provided every week for members to vote as to whether they were happy, unhappy or undecided as to what the Plett u3a committee is doing and providing by way of activities. (The vote was not about judging the event just experienced.) Of the votes received 99% were in the 'happy' category, so it seems we are on the right track. However, we need to be sure that we continue to meet your expectations over time to come. If not, please be sure to let us know! This is also a good time to ask each one of you to think about making suggestions for our programme of events, in terms of good speakers and interesting things to do and see. Most Plett people have amazing connections and knowledge, so please consider sharing your information.

Past activities

Documentaries

Classical Destinations is a music travelogue presented by Simon Callow. The tour of Europe highlights the great classical music created in each of the featured cities and regions. As the episodes are only 30 minutes long, two episodes were shown in each session.

Monday 31 July - E5: St. Petersburg

Former capital of Russia, with its canals earning it the description 'Venice of the North', St. Petersburg was home to a group of composers known as 'The Five' (Mily Balakirev - leader, Cesar Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, Alexander Borodin and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov) who worked together from 1856 to 1870 to create a distinct national Russian style of classical music. Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, a former naval officer, was a master of orchestration. He composed – amongst others - 15 operas, including 'Prince Igor', the symphonic suite Scheherazade, also known as The Arabian Nights, and The Flight of the Bumblebee.



Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov in 1898

E 6: Venice, Monteverdi, Vivaldi and the Four Seasons

A tour of Venice spotlights Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741), who composed 'The Four Seasons' between 1720 and 1723 while employed as the musical director at Ospedale della Pietà. This was a convent orphanage established by the wealthy ruling class with the aim of raising girls who would be useful to society from a practical or artistic point of view. Infants could be left at the Pietà via the scaffetta, a window only large enough to admit infants (not all infants were female, nor were they necessarily orphans). The all-female musical ensembles attracted audiences and patrons from around Europe. The female musicians, known as *figlie di coro*, were separated from the audience by a metal grill, following the example of convents, to protect the women from the gaze of the visitors. During his time at the orphanage, Vivaldi composed over 200 solo violin concertos, 27 for solo cello, and around 20 apiece for the flute and oboe, the latter for an outstanding young player at the Pietà referred to simply as "Susanna" in surviving documents.



Ospedale della Pietà



Monday August 7 - E7: Prague



Smetana serenaded its river, Dvorak started out as a dance band fiddler and Mozart enjoyed his greatest success in this beautiful city. Bedrich Smetana pioneered the development of a musical style that became closely identified with his people's aspirations to a cultural and political 'revival', namely to be free of Habsburg rule. Antonin Dvořák frequently employed aspects of the folk music of Moravia and his native Bohemia, following the example of his predecessor Smetana. Dvořák's style has been described as 'the fullest recreation of a national idiom with that of the symphonic tradition, absorbing folk influences and finding effective ways of using them'.

Dvořák's wrote his symphony no. 9, nicknamed *New World*, whilst in America in the 1890s. It reflects his discovery of African-American and Native-American melodies.

E8: Eisenach and the towns of J.S. Bach's travels



We follow J.S. Bach's career path through eastern Germany, from his birthplace in Eisenach to Arnstadt and Weimar. Near Eisenach is Wartburg Castle, where Martin Luther translated the New Testament of the Bible into German. Luther was founder of the Reformation, which gave rise to Protestantism. Johann Sebastian Bach was born on 21 March 1685 in Eisenach and spent the first 10 years of his life there. His father taught him to play string and wind instruments. Later the organ became his favourite instrument. In 1695, after the death of their parents, Johann Sebastian and his brother left Eisenach to live with their older brother in Ohrdruf.

Russia, a BBC documentary written and presented by Jonathan Dimbleby, was filmed in 2006 and broadcast in 2008. Russia is the largest country in the world, consisting of 17 million square km with a population of 145 million people, of which 107 million are urban dwellers. Forests cover 50% of the land, of which only 13% is agricultural. The rivers and lakes that network the country are used extensively for transportation.

Monday 14 August - Russia, E1: Breaking the ice



Dimbleby's journey began in mid-summer in the arctic circle of 'white nights', when the sun never sets. Murmansk, once a fishing village, became a major port and naval base in the Second World War, because the warm Gulf stream ensures that the sea never ices up there. During the war the city was razed to the ground and survivors lived off tree sap and boiling shoe leather, another example of Russia's history of terrible suffering. One of Dimbleby's aims was to find out what has replaced communism and what life in Russia is really like. People he spoke to in Murmansk and St Petersburg say that life is now much freer (or was in 2006) but they do not want democracy. They prefer vertical power structures.



Alyosha statue. This memorial (43 m high) commemorates the defenders of Murmansk in the Second World War

Dimbleby sails to Karelia, a land of mystery, forests and rivers, and home to the Demon's Nose on Onega Lake, where petroglyphs of birds and animals were carved in the coastal rocks during the Neolithic period about 6-7 thousand years ago. In a wooden village he visits a 'white witch', Baba Valja, who heals his back ailments by pressing on certain points with the tip of a large knife. Although witches were forbidden during the communist era, the leader of a neighbouring village asked her to protect his cattle from bears by casting spells. In Karelia people believe the forests are inhabited by sprites and demons. A group of babushkas (grannies), dressed in their embroidered national costumes, sing a song of love for Dimbleby. There are no men left in the village. In Russia men tend to smoke and drink themselves to death at an average age of 58.

The next stop is St Petersburg, a city of imposing buildings and waterways. It was founded on a swamp by Tsar Peter the Great in 1703 on the site of a captured Swedish fortress. St Petersburg is historically and culturally associated with the birth of the Russian Empire and Russia's entry into modern history as a European great power. Dostoevsky wrote about the dingy side of St Petersburg that still exists today. In the communist era the grand apartments of the rich and noble were commandeered to provide housing for the poor, sometimes with up to 100 people sharing one floor of a building. Three quarters of a million people still live in communal apartments with shared kitchens. The lack of privacy and forced sharing creates lives loaded with envy, but the people know no other life. The Russians differentiate between 'life' (of spiritual matters, such as self-realisation and achievements, eg. writing) and 'everyday life', which is concerned with material matters, such as sleeping, cooking, washing dishes and so on. Spiritual life is deemed to be more important.



Petroglyphs in Karelia



Wooden village in Karelia

The city was renamed Leningrad after Lenin's death in 1924. Even now the almost 900-day siege of Leningrad (1941-1944) is still alive many citizens' memories. More than 1.5 million people perished and the survivors lived off rations of 125 g of bread a day, cannibalism, or by trading a gold watch for animal fodder as human food. One man said 'They died for nothing.' During the siege Shostakovich wrote his symphony no. 7 'Leningrad', which was performed in 1942 by the Leningrad Radio Orchestra, whose members, weakened by starvation, could barely hold their instruments. The performance was broadcast throughout the city and gave the city's survivors hope. They did not surrender.



St Petersburg

Travelling down the Volkhov river Dimbleby follows the route of the Vikings, when they made their way through Russia to the Black Sea and Constantinople in the 9th century. Along the banks are huge burial mounds, which contain significant archaeological artefacts. Modern Russia derives its name from the old Norse word 'Rus', meaning 'the men who row'. The first trading post the Rus established was Novgorod, traditionally considered to be the cradle of Russian statehood. It became a city of culture and learning until it was annexed by the city state of Moscow in 1478.



8th to 10th century Viking burial mounds along the Volkhov near Staraya Ladoga

In the year 1110 Vladimir I, Prince of Novgorod, sent his envoys throughout the world to assess first-hand the major religions of the time: Islam, Roman Catholicism, Judaism, and Byzantine Christian Orthodoxy. He favoured the eastern orthodox rituality and the fact that its church leader was not the political leader. What is now known as the Russian Orthodox Church reinforced his authority. Official Church doctrine stated that the Tsar was appointed by God. The Tsars protected the priests and the priests protected the Tsars. From then on Russia used religion to unite and control its populace.

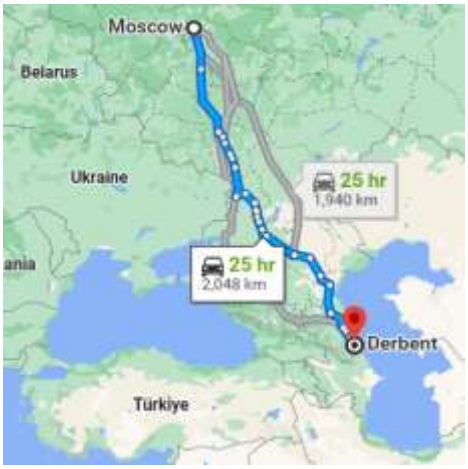


Viking metal artefacts, Novgorod

The final destination is Moscow, where 'communism is dead and capitalism is rampant'. The city is characterised by growth and traffic jams that can last up to eight hours. Dimbleby decides to visit a bath house, a 'banya'. This is usually a social event, or a favourite meeting place for business men or mafia leaders. After being thwacked with birch twigs and enjoying (?) the steam baths, we leave him moaning (loudly) whilst being massaged vigorously by a not too gentle giant.



Sanduny banya (bath house) in Moscow





House of Leo Tolstoy in Yasnaya Polyana



Potato harvesting, Veronezh

Monday 28 August - Russia, E2: Country matters

In Moscow, 'a city of glitz and conspicuous consumption', Dimbleby finds himself at a reception for a Madonna concert, attended by the rich and famous, including top restaurateur, Arkady Novikov, who subsequently invites him to one of his 100 restaurants. The next day he takes a train to the family estate of Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), arguably the greatest of all Russian writers, who 'saw into the soul of Russian people'. Tolstoy's home (now a museum) contains Tolstoy's personal effects and furniture. The estate, Yasnaya Polyana, is run by Tolstoy's great-great-grandson and it still looks as it did when Tolstoy was alive.

On the way to Veronezh Dimbleby travels through the agricultural heartland of Russia, where the black earth ('black gold') can be a metre deep. Here family plots produce 95% of all of Russia's potatoes, which are still harvested by hand. The peasants, poor but tenacious, live much the same way as they did 150 years ago; some villages have no electricity and draw water from wells. Nearby, in a forest, Dimbleby visits the memorial to those peasants who resisted Stalin's regime. It is unknown whether five or ten thousand people were shot and buried there.

The Republic of Dagestan, North Caucusus, is in the southernmost tip of Russia. The area, one of Russia's most linguistically and ethnically diverse, has over 30 ethnic groups and 81 nationalities, all of which are fiercely independent. Tolstoy fought in The Caucasian War (1817-1864), which was a conflict between the Russian Empire and the various mountain tribes of the North Caucasus who resisted subjugation during the Russian conquest of the Caucasus. Imam Shamil, for 25 years the political, military, and spiritual leader of North Caucasian resistance, is still regarded as a hero in Dagestan today.

Derbent, a city in Dagestan, is located on the Caspian Sea. Derbent claims to be the oldest city in Russia, with historical documentation dating to the 8th century BC,





Derbent

making it one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Due to its strategic location, over the course of history, the city changed ownership many times, particularly among the Persian, Arab, Mongol, Timurid and Shirvan kingdoms. In the 19th century, the city passed from Persian into Russian hands by the Treaty of Gulistan of 1813, when the city fathers handed over the town's keys rather than fight a war.

The fortifications of Derbent, built in the 6th century by the Persian emperor Khosrow I, comprise three distinct elements: the citadel of Naryn-Kala and the twin long walls connecting it with the Caspian Sea in the east, and the 'mountain wall' of Dagh-Bary. The immense wall (sometimes compared to the Great Wall of China), with a height of up to twenty meters and a thickness of about 3 meters, stretches for forty kilometres between the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus Mountains, effectively blocking the passage across the Caucasus.

By now Dimbleby has travelled 6 500 km through Russia and has discovered that Russia is its people, and that they are warm, friendly and welcoming.

Talks

Wednesday 2 August: Rob Berry – The Southwest Coast Path in England, part 2.



The final part of Rob's talk took us from Land's End to Minehead, starting from the coastal village of Sennen Cove in Cornwall. Rob again provided an engaging presentation, filled with snippets of information covering numerous topics, such as literature, geology, history and wildlife – with occasional references to beer. For example, Doom Bar beer is named after the dangerous Doom Bar sandbank at the mouth of the Camel Estuary in north Cornwall.

On parts of the Southwest Coast path (SWCP) you can still find yourself walking alone, far from the madding crowds. It can be challenging, as the path hugs the coast and you frequently go down to the shore, only to climb back up shortly afterwards - sometimes several times a day. If you walk the entire 1000 km it's the equivalent elevation change of walking up Everest four times.

Many of Rob's photos of the Devon and Cornwall coasts show secluded coves with golden surf-washed beaches and turquoise waters that look more like idyllic tropical destinations than what one would imagine a British coastline to be. The path passes many Cornish tin mines, such as Botallack, which featured in the BBC TV series *Poldark*. The tin mines (now all closed) often had tunnels extending under the sea. St Ives has become renowned for its number of artists. In 1993 the Tate Gallery opened a branch in St Ives. The Godrevy Lighthouse in St Ives Bay is said to have inspired Virginia Woolf, author of *To the Lighthouse* (although she locates the lighthouse in the Hebrides).

Padstow is the home of Rick Stein (English restaurateur and TV celebrity chef). He owns so many restaurants, shops and hotels in Padstow that the town is becoming known as Padstein. Port Isaac is the fictional Portwenn in the ITV television series *Doc Martin*. Between Port Isaac and Boscastle is Tintagel Castle, the supposed birthplace of King Arthur, now something of a tourist trap. A flash flood on 16 August 2004 caused extensive damage to the village of Boscastle. Residents were trapped in houses as the roads turned into rivers, but fortunately no lives were lost – unlike the 1952 flash floods that swept through the Devon village of Lynmouth, when 35 people died. That disaster was officially termed 'the hand of God', but new evidence from previously classified government files suggests that scientists experimenting with artificial rainmaking by seeding clouds there could possibly be implicated.

The last stretch covered was Bude to Minehead. Bude is a small port and picturesque village in the north-eastern extremity of Cornwall. Over the border, in Devon near the mouth of the Bristol Channel, is Clovelly, a beautiful, picturesque fishing village. Once owned by the Queen of England it is now privately owned. The village clings to a 400 foot cliff and has only the one cobbled 'street' which drops almost vertically down to the harbour and is inaccessible to vehicular traffic. Wooden sledges are used to haul goods up and down. Lynmouth, a Devon village on the northern edge of Exmoor, straddles the confluence of the West Lyn and East Lyn rivers in a gorge 210 m below Lynton, which was the only place to expand to once Lynmouth became built-up. The villages are connected by the Lynton and Lynmouth Cliff Railway, which has never used electric power. Two connected cable cars pull each other by gravity using water tanks. The walk/talk ended at a pub in Minehead.

Some of Rob's wildlife sightings: on his way back to his B&B one evening he came across a family of badgers playing in the dusky light, taking no notice of him. Another evening he encountered clouds of fireflies flitting about him. Once, gazing into the ocean, he saw a herd of seahorses; another time a group of basking sharks. Although he hasn't ever seen choughs (a member of the crow family which features on the Cornwall coat of arms) Rob told us that this species was extinct in Cornwall for 50 years until their natural return in 2001. No wonder the SWCP became a 30-year addiction for Rob.



Devon coastline



Clovelly



Minehead

Outings

Wednesday 23 August – Garden walk at the Kwendalo wellness centre

The day began with rain, temperatures around 12 degrees and winds between 25 km-40 km. Thankfully the rain stopped shortly before our walk, but it remained chilly and windy. Nevertheless, there was a great turnout. Nico Weeber, the manager, greeted us and provided an overview of the Kwendalo holistic wellness centre. Gift, the garden manager, took us on a guided tour through the medicinal herb garden, as well as the chakra and market gardens, all of which were developed using regenerative agricultural methods. They provide food and medicine for the centre. The gardens were designed by landscaper Paul Martin, an Irish man, who has won several gold medals at Chelsea.

Chakras are the energy centres of the body. When blocked, your physical, mental, and emotional health may be negatively affected. The seven main chakras are located along the spine, starting at its base and running upwards to the crown of the head, and are named as they appear in the body, for example, heart chakra. Different colours are associated with each chakra. Accordingly, each chakra circle in the garden is predominantly planted in the chakra's colour (eg. orange) and with herbs and medicinal plants that benefit that part of the body.

The walk continued to the main dam and source of water for the gardens, which has a lovely waterfall – and a pair of coots that we disturbed off their nest. Afterwards we were happy to be able to cosy up to the fire in the café, where we enjoyed a delicious muffin and special chocolate treat with our tea and coffee. Visit our Facebook site for more photos.


Medicinal herb garden


Chakra garden


Market garden

Programme calendar

Use our website programme calendar to view our forthcoming events by day, week or month. The calendar is printable. After clicking on a specific event you can click to either invite a friend, RSVP, or copy the event and its details to your online or phone calendar.

Committee

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Facebook	Beth Hackland	072-266-1821
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Membership	Peter Grube	083-381-5929
Newsletter	Felicity (Flick) Grube	082-557-7779
Outings	Beth Hackland	072-266-1821
Programme coordinator	Lynette Timme	079-313-9641
Website	Felicity (Flick) Grube	082-557-7779

Special interest groups

Chess	Frank Hollenberg	082-566-2964.
Computer basics	Peter Grube	083-381-5929
French conversation (full)	Merle Decot	084 581 7379
French for beginners	Ingrid James	076-689-5245
German	Doris Engelhardt	082 626 0212
Music (Monday Music Memos)	Peter Grube	083-381-5929
Poetry group	Chrissy Hay	083-648-0306
Science group	Henry Timme	078-877-5829

General enquiries u3aplett@gmail.com



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