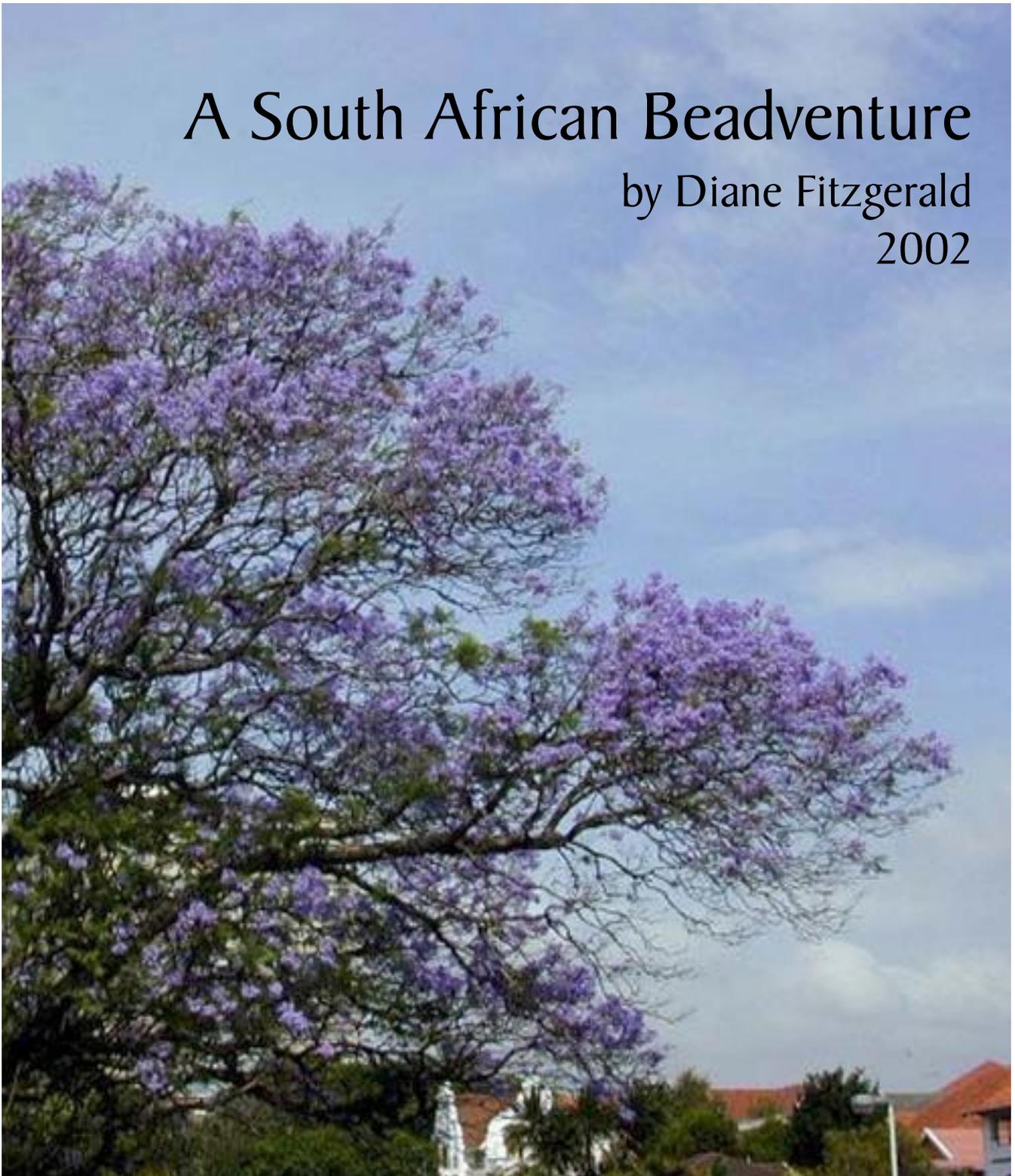


A South African Beadventure

by Diane Fitzgerald

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For more information about Beadventures hosted by Cheryl Coberne-Brown, please visit her website:

<http://www.beadventure.com>

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The KLM flight into Cape Town, South Africa, was early so as our pilot circled he pointed out the sights of the coastline—Table Mountain, Cape Town's most famous landmark; then Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was held prisoner; False Bay, ringed by quaint seaside towns; and finally the airport where our two-week Beadventure Tour began.

It was springtime in South Africa with flowers in bloom everywhere. Jacaranda trees provided canopies of purple flowers under sunny skies, and protea, the national flower of South Africa, could be seen by the roadside as the bus took us to Tudor House, a guest house in Fish Hoek just outside Cape Town. We would see whales spouting and flipping their tails from our balconies.

The tour, on which I was the featured instructor, was led by Cheryl Coberne-Brown, former director of The Bead Museum in Glendale, Arizona, and it promised to be the adventure of a lifetime. Our guide throughout our Cape Town visit was Stephen Long, an experienced South African collector and bead trader of some twenty years, who narrated stories of his travels to villages and general information about South African politics, industry, and life. He learned to speak Xhosa, an ethnic group living in rural South Africa who have made vast quantities of beaded items, at an early age and was fascinated with these people and their beadwork. He often repairs the beadwork he collects and in this way has learned a great deal about its construction.

Everyone was anxious to begin seeing the sights and get some fresh air after the long



Diane Fitzgerald (L), Beadventure instructor, and Cheryl Coberne-Browne (R), Beadventure tour leader, modeling new beads and headwear.

flight, so we immediately left for Simonstown, just up the coast, to stretch our legs and visit a shop where we would see a private collection of old Xhosa beadwork. As Stephen explained how the pieces were used, we took turns modeling headbands, sashes, blanket pins and bracelets, amazed at the variety and size of the pieces. That evening, we dined at Bon Appetite, one of the top 100 restaurants in South Africa where French cuisine tempted our palettes but didn't drain our wallets because the U.S. dollar is equal to almost 10 rand, the South African unit of currency.

Stephen Long explaining how this beadwork was used.



But South Africa isn't all ethnic beadwork. A visit to the studio of Margee Gough in nearby Darling impressed us all. Margee beads in the contemporary Western/American style, loaded with embellishments, and it's not surprising that her work was a winner in the Embellished Shoe contest sponsored by *Beadwork* magazine.

We had enjoyed Cape Town, but we knew there was more in store for us in Durban, a major city some 1500 miles up the eastern coast of South Africa from Cape Town. One of our first stops was the Phansi Museum, a private museum owned by architect Paul Micula who delivered a short history of South African beadwork and its evolution as we surveyed his extensive collection under glass. Paul was instrumental in establishing the BAT Center, a stopping point for viewing many types of South African crafts, including beadwork and the *Nancy Fullerton of Indiana wearing a Bushman beaded and baubled headband.*



Zulu beaders at work with basket trays to hold beads and legs extended straight out.

telephone wire and grass baskets that Zulus are noted for in both coiled and plaited techniques.

At the home of Jane Bedford, a noted Durban jewelry designer, we beaded with Zulu beaders who proved to be the quickest learners of any beaders in my experience, grasping even complicated techniques after just a short demonstration and no verbal instruction. Zulu women bead sitting on grass mats with legs outstretched and beads on a lap tray. Often the group will sing in harmony and occasionally take a break to dance vigorously.

The trip wasn't all beads. We visited Cape Point, the southernmost tip of South Africa, and looked out over the ocean imagining the early ships who called this point Cape Fear. Visiting a jackass penguin colony was another stop. Watching these delightful animals waddle back and forth and frolic in the ocean brought smiles to everyone. A picnic lunch in a botanical garden, a typical Xhosa lunch in one of Cape Town's townships, visits to craft workshops, and evenings beading and listening to Stephen's stories of collecting are fond memories of this very special tour.

A beadwork teacher accompanies each Beadventure Tour and provides special projects. For the South African Beadventure, Diane planned four projects related to the country: a Diamond Bracelet (diamond mining is a major part of South Africa's economy), a King Protea Pin (the National Flower), a South African Flag pin and a Shongololo Necklace. Shongololo is the Afrikaans word for centipede, an insect found in every local garden.



Diane admires a Zulu girl's bracelet in a remote rural area near Ladysmith.



Bargaining for beads!



Henry, our Bushman friend, explains how ostrich eggshell beads are made.



Delicious food throughout the trip...

