

PC16/174/4/90
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Dear Hans,

I'm glad to say that you are adding starting to widen your horizons and are adding a bit of elementary zoology to your basic botany. I am impressed, too, by the number of miles you say we covered. Does your map tell you where Loch Awe is? Looking at my great-grandfather's gravestone I see that that was where my great-grandfather. If it isn't too far I thought we might go and investigate on our next trip. It is somewhere in Argyleshire -- a beautiful, unspoilt-by-development part of the world I have heard it said!

I have watched others operating word-processors but have not yet approached too closely to one myself. I hear that they can have problems. It seems yours might have had one too. What else could explain how a letter started on it in August had to be finished off by hand in October?

Our floods were devastating. The dam you saw on TV was probably a new one they are building in the Ugeni valley to supply Durban. It was only supposed to fill up in about ten years time, so many of the people living in the area which was due to be flooded eventually had not yet been moved away. Instead it filled up almost overnight and flooded hundreds of homes. The worst-hit person I have seen was Greina Alcock. Their house is on the banks of the Tugela, but high up. One would never have thought the river could have got anywhere near it. It did, flooded it out and then receded to leave it buried in silt. They had to dig the house out of the mud. Luckily she was away at the time but what was left of the records of Alcock's activities disappeared. I went down there the week before last with Elliot. He may look like the Fijian coup-men but unfortunately lacks the means to carry one out here.

The news from here is anything but cheerful. The Schreiner's daughter has been in detention in Cape Town for over two months. Newspaper speculation attaches her to some ANC cell but of hard information there is absolutely none. Visits to Cape Town have helped her parents not at all. Mink's they are met by the standard SE reply "Your daughter is quite alright. Sorry, we can't answer any more questions." You can imagine the strain of living under this uncertainty; and it comes at a time when Deneys is on the point of retiring but is very much caught up in the confrontation which is building up between the universities and the Minister over his plan to cut subsidies to universities which don't control and report 'undesirable' activities of staff and students.

Mitchell's school has come through the year well, but there must be a big question-mark against its future. Even if the financial side is resolved the authorities could refuse to register it at any time. But there is another problem. The years of struggle are beginning to take their toll. Mary is not well, with what I would guess is some fairly serious heart/blood-pressure condition, and John is tired. I don't think he wants to spend the rest of his life fighting for survival. Much the best solution would be for somebody with views similar to John's to buy the bloody place and get him to run it for a year or two of transition.

But who?

Although it may not look much like it, please regard this as a Christmas card.... and keep hoping that 1988 is an improvement on 1987. Unless something goes wrong we'll see you sometime in mid-year.

Yours, Alan