

Geno's Place

Adventure stories for kids that love to learn

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Bungy Jumping and Bridge Swinging

The seeds of my South African adventure were planted years ago when a young man named Anthony wrote me and said he found my scuba diving web pages and wanted to share something about himself. Anthony said he is a paraplegic and also likes to do scuba diving. I realized we are brothers of different mothers. We both used wheelchairs and enjoyed extreme sports. We kept in contact and one day Anthony sent me a video clip of someone in a wheelchair bridge swinging. I was hooked. I knew one day I would travel to South Africa to do some bridge swinging.

As fate would have it, a close friend of mine, Joni (pictured with me at right), told me she planned on visiting South Africa. I told her about my pen pal, Anthony and encouraged her to meet him. Emails were exchanged and when Joni arrived in South Africa, she made arrangements to meet Anthony. The two of them hit it right off.



Geno's South African Adventures

Bungy Jumping and Bridge Swinging

The passage of time saw Joni moving to South Africa, and then years later, yearning to move back to the States. This seemed like the perfect time - or should I say perfect excuse, for me to go to South Africa to visit Joni, meet Anthony, and do some bridge swinging. The wheels were set into motion. I looked into flights while Joni and Anthony planned my itinerary.

The distance from Austin, Texas in the USA to Cape Town, South Africa is about 9,500 miles, as the crow flies. Not being a crow, I was resigned to use the airlines. My travel buddy, Laurence, and I were scheduled to fly from Austin, Texas to Washington DC, then on to Cape Town, South Africa. However, we missed our connecting flight from Washington DC. Then our luggage took a different route and we were without it for four days, but all that is another story.

According to my research, South Africa has 11 official languages. Of the official languages, two are English and Afrikaans, a language derived from the Dutch who settled Cape Town in the mid 17th century. English is widely spoken in South Africa so I didn't need to concern myself with translations. Instead of the dollar though, they used the Rand. One Rand is equal to about 13 cents. It takes about 8 Rands to equal one US dollar.



Getting the harness on.

Our first several days in Cape Town really were an adventure, in part because of our lost luggage but also because Joni and Anthony planned a fun filled visit for us. One of our itinerary items was bridge swinging - an adventure Anthony suggested to me years earlier. To go bridge swinging we drove to Gourits River Bridge. It is about 4 1/2 hours east of Cape Town. This is where bungee jumping began in South Africa. Gourits River Bridge is 65 meters high, and is the longest running bungee site in Africa. The company we used, that ran the bungee jumping / bridge swinging there, was called Face Adrenalin (www.faceadrenalin.com/). The concept of bridge swinging is to swing from one bridge, under another to which the rope is attached, like a pendulum. Bungee jumping is a drop straight down. Your fall is slowed by the bungee cords, stretching, before you reach the bottom. Once the cords stretch to their maximum, they begin contracting, bouncing the jumper back up.

Bridge Swinging

Anthony was the first to go off the platform. They didn't tie him to his chair though, so he and the chair were swinging in the breeze. As I was getting my harness on, I told Laurence to be sure I was securely attached to my wheelchair.

Bungy Jumping and Bridge Swinging



Once assured all was connected properly, I was lifted to the edge of the bridge platform. A strong push and I was off and away! I dropped about ten feet then was swung under the opposite bridge. After swinging back and forth like a pendulum a few times, I was eventually lowered to the river where I was transferred to a boat, brought ashore, and then carried up to the top of the canyon, to the bridge. Now that's what I call bridge swinging!



Bungy Jumping

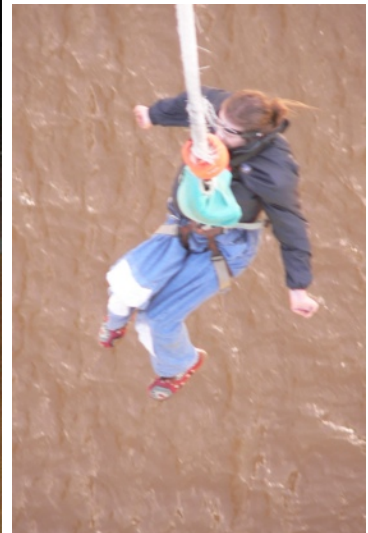
Bungy Jumping is a bit different from bridge swinging. In the picture at left, you can see I'm not in my wheelchair. They put a harness on me, set me on this ledge, then pushed me off. That ledge was 210 feet above the river. As I fell, the bungee cords stretched, slowing me down. When the cords could stretch no more, I bounced back up. I bounced up and down at least twice.



Bungy Jumping and Bridge Swinging



In the picture above, they are about to push me off the ledge. When I bounced back up the first time it was scary because it looked like I was going to hit the very bridge I was pushed off. I bounced up and down a few times. That's me on the bottom right, hanging from the bungee cord. The harness worked out pretty well so I didn't have to hold on to it. I finally quit bouncing and they lowered me to a boat that was waiting in the river. They disconnected me from the bungee cord and took me to shore. From there, they carried me, while in the boat, farther up on shore, then in a truck back to the bridge. That's me on the left, below, and my friend Anthony.



Bungy Jumping and Bridge Swinging

If you would like to see the video of me bridge swinging, and bungy jumping, go to my web site (<http://www.genosplace.org/SA/BungeeJumping/Bungy.html>)

Story Questions:

1. Name 3 of the 4 countries that surround South Africa.
1. How far is it from Austin, Texas to Cape Town, South Africa?
2. What languages do they speak in South Africa?
3. The bridge we used was 65 meters high. How many feet is that?
4. Would you rather bungy jump or go bridge swinging? Why?
5. How many South African Rands would you need to buy a hamburger that costs about \$2.50 in US currency?

Fun Facts:

Bungy jumping was "invented" by the natives of Vanuatu (as a rite of passage for boys to attain manhood), who jump from a tall, rickety wooden tower and rely on vines tied around one leg to stop their fall. Each year, in conjunction with the yam harvest, giant towers are constructed in the southern villages of Vanuatu's Pentecost Island. The wooden towers themselves are amazing structures; up to 70 feet tall, each of their joints are lashed together with local vines. But to pull off the stunt 'properly', the jumper must just hit the ground! It was AJ Hackett, of New Zealand who perfected it into the "sport" it is today.

The Guinness World Record

Face Adrenalin caused great excitement in the Bungy jumping sport worldwide with the opening of the Face Adrenalin Bloukrans Bridge Bungy Jump. Bloukrans is officially recognized by Guinness World Records as being the World's Highest Commercial Bungy Jump at a whopping 216 meters high! A proud record for South Africa.