

MONDAY 24th March – acclimatisation, by This Correspondent

Monday started with breakfast, the measuring of most people's chambers and then a change into Number Ones for the team photograph. The photo was set up in a nice patch of shade which at least meant everyone avoiding the need to squint... but would people's faces be visible? The ground was a bit damp and Martin Townsend came to regret all those occasions that he had been first in the lunch queue, as his chair sank deeper and deeper into the mud... look how short he looks in the photo! And can you tell how he manifested his sartorial rebellious streak?

It was a beautiful day and, among others, Rick Shouler was gleeful about having escaped the snow at home to bask in the glorious sunshine. He was also extolling the virtues of his non-creamy, non-sticky, clear spray-on, immediate absorption sun cream. Jumbo immediately seized it, while driving, and sprayed it onto his bald patch.

Most of the team walked the range in the morning to get the lie of the land. The coaches also peered through a scope and experience the lying of the mirage – or rather, it demonstrated a propensity to change its mind rather rapidly. We also checked out the shaded shelters in which we would seek refuge later in the week, before heading back to the hotel and rushing through a very brief opportunity for shopping before a 1pm departure for an Italian lunch.

After lunch, various groups disappeared ostensibly to different Bloemfontein sights, supposedly including the Botanical Garden and Telegraph Hill. The captain was among those who had returned to the guest house. And he thought he had everyone fooled, with some reading material perched on his knee, but we're quite good at telling the difference between someone who's sleeping and someone who's reading, and Chris has the photographic evidence!

Talking of photographic evidence, never believe anyone who claims that the camera never lies. Much of the afternoon was spent by Rick and Chris editing the team photos from the morning, taking a head from here, a piece of grass from there and generally trying to iron out any imperfections... but the very first thing they did was to remove some of Jumbo's chins.