

1996: the year that was for Riemke and Maarten

Shell Central Office reorganisation

This year the reorganisation of Shell Central Office was more or less completed, including the demise of the corporate Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) division, which has been Maarten's home (personnel wise) since he joined Shell in 1975. As had already become clear last year, Maarten was likely to move lock, stock and barrel to the Exploration and Production organisation and so he did in February. He is now one of a group of four environmental management advisors in the Health, Safety and Environment group of Shell International Exploration and Production, which is the new service company for exploration and production of oil and gas. .

HSE in Exploration and Production sits in the Strategy and Business Services directorate rather than in Research and Technology, as is the case in the Oil Products and Chemicals sectors. However, much of Maarten's time has been taken up by providing services to Operating Units, including environmental auditing and environmental management training. As one of our friends remarked, "Maarten is the most travelled person that I know" and this has certainly been the case in 1996. New countries included Zaire and Angola, Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, Thailand and Australia. But he also went to Russia, Kazakstan, Gabon and Nigeria. He now collects points in the frequent flyer programmes of KLM, Lufthansa, Swissair, Air France and British Midland. Needless to say, that we have not found time to spend any of these points, but maybe next year will be a bit more relaxed.

All in all the reorganisation is now settling out, although a recent survey among Central Office and Research laboratories staff (research and development have been merged with technology development and technical services in Shell) indicates that it has not been a happy process. It will certainly take some time for everything to fall into their right places.

Holiday

In contrast to previous years, we have found time to go on holiday this year, albeit in a special form. Riemke was the Dutch organiser of an exchange visit between the Dutch Association of University Women and the Wisconsin branches of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), which have been twinned since an International Federation of University Women conference in Palo Alto in 1992. In 1994, a group of Wisconsin women visited the Netherlands and this year a Dutch group went over to the USA. Maarten joined the partner programme. The visit took part in July and led to four different places in Wisconsin, where we were housed with AAUW members. Following the visit, we stayed on in Wisconsin for another week, during which we toured part of the state that we had not visited yet, among other places Sheboygan on Lake Michigan.

Just south of Sheboygan there is a village called Oostburg, where a number of Dutch emigrants settled in the middle of the last century, among them a family Smies from Zeeland. There is a Smies Road, on which the settlers built their homestead and four or five families Smies are still living there now. On Smies Road there is also the Oostburg cemetery, where there are some six Smies family graves. It was a strange experience to stand before headstones bearing your own name on the other side of the earth. Of course, these immigrants are not our own family, which originates from Borculo in the east of the Netherlands.

More Dutch people have settled in this area and close by there is another village, which sports a Dutch museum, a Dutch shop and a cafe called De Zwaan (The Swan). We just missed the annual Dutch weekend there, where there is klompendancing (clog dancing) and the consumption of Dutch sausage rolls and where until recently there was a Miss Holland election. Portraits of Miss Hollands adorn the walls in the De Zwaan cafe. We shall need to go back another time to see this activity.

The visit to the AAUW Wisconsin branches was very well organised and almost all communication between the Wisconsin organiser and Riemke took place by Email on the Internet, which worked very well. Riemke has an Email address at the university and Maarten has access to the Internet from his office, so that even between us there are silly exchanges of information, such as "late for dinner tonight" if the telephone does not find one of us behind the office desk.

Staying at home with AAUW members and their families was a wonderful experience because it is so different from normal holidays, when one meets the locals in a much more cursory fashion. The same can be said for the programme, which offered us a unique insight into American life.

Our first stay was at Janesville, which is some two hours driving to the north of Chicago, where our flight landed. Here we made, among other things, an excursion to the confluence of the Wisconsin and Mississippi rivers with expert instruction by an AAUW member, who is a fisheries biologist with the American Fisheries and Wildlife Service. We also visited an old mining town, originally populated by Cornish immigrants.

From Janesville we moved to the area around Lake Winnebago, where the group was spread among AAUW members from four different local branches. Riemke and I stayed with a family, who had lived for a considerable time in Germany (ex US Army), which made for good conversation on their and our experiences of living abroad. Here we made an excursion to Door county, which is the thumb of Wisconsin sticking out into Lake Michigan. Again good local guidance by AAUW members. Door county is rather touristy and this was at the height of the season, and yes there were some people about, although in the Netherlands one would hardly have noticed them.

From there we went to Sauk Prairie and Baraboo in the centre of the State. We had very nice hosts here as well, who lived in a beautiful house on Lake Wisconsin. Outings included the Crane Foundation, a walk around and on the interesting geology of the local lake and some shopping, including safety mountaineering boots for Maarten.

Our trip ended in Madison, the State capital, where we visited the State Capitol and the State Historical Museum as well as the local art fair. Our host in Madison has a bookshop, which is entirely devoted to mystery called Booked for Murder, where we spent an exclusive evening of shopping. No wonder that we needed to buy another suitcase to take all our goodies back home. Our host's husband was a chemist, retired from the State Environmental Protection Agency. They also took us to Frank Lloyd Wright's studio, which was extremely worthwhile and to an open air theatre, where we saw a spirited performance of Moliere's The Misanthrope.

An important part of the programme was devoted to education. We visited a summer school, which like summer camps are necessary because children in the USA have long summer holidays while their parents have limited leave. In addition, we went to the University of Wisconsin, which has a number of local branches in addition to the main campus at Madison, to Beloit University, which is a private college, and to Fox River Valley Technical College. All these visits were very interesting and the programmes of these institutions showed a different and probably better approach to education and continued education than is on offer in the Netherlands.

Our private week following the official visit was nice, also because the weather was very beautiful. Riemke had plotted a interesting route on the map, which turned out to be following the moraines left after the Ice Age and which was a waymarked geological trail. We also went to a 30 000 ha Federal Wildlife Refuge, which allowed a good comparison with the total of 75 000 ha which the Dutch National Trust administers in the Netherlands. It will be worthwhile to go back another time.

Politics in Leiden

The Faculty of Social Sciences in Leiden also went through a reorganisation. This did not affect Riemke directly, as she is appointed in the Faculty of Law, which is the other parent of the Department of Political Sciences. However, the general atmosphere at the Department did not improve as a result. Riemke is now teaching a first year course, because a colleague of her, who taught this course for years, is no longer allowed to do so because the Faculty of Social Sciences now requires that all teaching staff are PhDs, while this requirement does not exist in the Law Faculty.

These developments were overshadowed by accusations of plagiarism levelled at one of the professors in the Psychology department at the Social Faculty. He is a very well known author of psychological self-help books, which according to one of the Dutch weeklies were to a large extent translated American texts. As these accusations were borne out, the professor has had to resign despite his popularity with the students and the considerable fund raising that he has done for the department. It was he, as the dean of the Faculty, who started the reorganisation though under the name "On course for quality". He dismissed the non-PhDs ... for lack of quality.

Apart from teaching International Relations and the introductory course on Dutch politics Riemke is the manager of the Research School which involves all Dutch political scientists and PhD-students, called Polybios. This is great fun as neither the students nor the researchers feel any commitment to the School, and it is therefore always a triumph when any workshop/summer school/course succeeds.

Our beloved son

Last year Jurjen started on a communications course at a polytechnical college at Utrecht. This spring it turned out that he had also given this course up. Much to our regret he is now again unemployed at 26 with still no idea what he wants to do with the rest of his life. We are afraid that the six ill-spent years following his completion of grammar school will now start to haunt him when it comes to finding a job. He is a very healthy young man and devotes his time to the amateur Anglo-American Theatre Company. Riemke expects him to become a successful actor, which will become clear by January when the Company stages its annual production in "Diligentia". Jurjen changed digs and now rents an apartment together with two friends in The Hague, where all their friends seem to flock down.

The Oman Magazine

Riemke continues to play a part in the Oman Magazine, which is published by the Oman Netherlands Friendship Foundation. She has written a fair number of articles for it, including an interview with the leader of the Dutch Liberal (i.e. Conservative) Party, who visited the Sultanate. And one with a Unilever boss, who has not yet been there. She also wrote a long article on a small business development scheme, which has been set up by Shell in Oman as a present on the occasion of the 25 year reign of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. There were interesting comparisons with a small business scheme sponsored by Shell in the Netherlands, which made the article more attractive because of the Dutch and Omani connections. We both regret not having been able to go back to Oman, but by now nearly all our friends have left for positions elsewhere.

Living out of suitcases

Maarten has really been on the road this year. In addition to his responsibilities for environmental management of exploration and production projects in Russia and Kazakstan, he was asked to become the environmental management advisor for Africa and to co-ordinate environmental management training. In addition he has led environmental audits in Thailand and in Australia.

In Kazakstan (this is the official new spelling) the exploration research study of the Caspian Sea has now been completed. In November, Maarten directed another environmental course for the Kazakstan Ministry of Ecology and Bio-Resources, which followed the course given in 1995. He is now awaiting future development of the Caspian Sea Project, which will comprise the drilling of a number of exploration wells. As yet it is not clear which of the partner companies in the venture will lead this stage of the project. It is however unlikely that the organisation model of the seismic study, in which a Kazak company was the operator on behalf of the Consortium, with staff from the non-Kazak partners on secondment to this company, will be used again. The general conviction is that exploration drilling is too critical to be operated in that manner.

Together with some colleagues Maarten delivered a number of workshops on environmental and waste management in Abu Dhabi in the spring and in the late summer. In Nigeria and in Gabon his occupational health colleague and he gave workshops on occupational health and environmental management. Maarten had not been in Nigeria since 1987 and his last visit to Gabon dates back to 1993, so that it was good for him to be back in these countries.

In addition, Maarten had a trainee from the Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria, who has been appointed head of waste management in Western Division. The trainee is a geologist by training and he is a very pleasant outgoing person. Fortunately, he also turned out to be a self-starter who went his own way, which was convenient as Maarten was away on business during a large part of his training period, which he spent in part with NAM and Shell UK Expro.

Thailand and Australia were both new countries for Maarten. In Thailand he carried out an environmental audit together with a former colleague from HSE Division, who following a posting to exploration and production in The Hague has moved to Shell UK Expro in Aberdeen. In Australia he conducted an audit at Woodside Offshore Petroleum and took the opportunity to visit his successor in Oman, who has since retired prematurely because of a reorganisation of Woodside while he worked in Oman and who is now a consultant. It was a pity that Riemke had to teach and that Maarten had to travel on to Gabon immediately after the audit in Australia and we fully intend to make good an earlier promise to go on holiday to Australia in the not too distant future.

Woodside Offshore Petroleum operate a domestic and a liquefied natural gas plant in the north-west of Western Australia. A beautiful place to be and almost on the opposite side of the world compared with Oman. Muscat sits on the Tropic of Cancer, while Karratha is just north of the Tropic

of Capricorn. And as it was late spring over there, the weather was still nicely warm and not yet unbearably hot.

Woodside's main office is in Perth, where 1.5 of the 2 million inhabitants of Western Australia live. Perth stretches for some 50 km along the coast of the Indian Ocean and both to the south and to the north of Perth, there are very attractive natural areas. On his final weekend in Australia Maarten went to Pemberton, 350 km south of Perth where his friends have bought a woodland plot, where they intend to build a retirement home. Their plot backs onto a state forest reserve, so that they will have a view of forest in perpetuity.

With visits to Zaire and Angola, Maarten has essentially been travelling since September and he would love to spend some time doing work in The Hague for a change.

The Dutch National Trust

In November Maarten entered his final year of service on the board of the Dutch National Trust for Nature Conservation. For good measure he has been appointed vice-president on the retirement of the previous incumbent. The job is primarily directed at the affairs of the National Trust as a society and it includes among other tasks the chairpersonship of the agenda committee for the Council meetings.

In a year's time Maarten will have to step down, after seven years as a Council member and eight years as a member of the Board. He is certainly going to miss it and as yet he is not sure what he may be going to do in his spare time to fill the gap.

Surprisingly, Maarten's travels have hardly interfered with his activities for the National Trust. On a few occasions, he has had to travel to Schiphol to take a flight immediately following a Trust meeting or excursion but by and large he has been able to attend all meetings. However, this year we missed the annual excursion of the Board and Directors, which is a great event because the partners also take part in it. However, because of the retirement of two of the Trust's directors, a reunion was held for all Board members, which turned out to be a lively occasion.

Riemke Riemersma and Maarten Smies