

Oak Ridge Tour for Onkemetse Manaapelo and Maria Modise

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on August 31, 2015)

On Saturday, 8/22/15, I had the privilege of providing a personalized tour for two visitors to Oak Ridge. Something I am doing more and more frequently. However, this tour coming just two days after a tour I helped provide for Victor Knox of the National Park Service caused me to give serious thought to the Manhattan Project National Historical Park and just what we may see more and more of as the park becomes a reality in our city.

At the end of the day, Thursday, 8/20/15, in the small auditorium of the American Museum of Science and Energy, a momentous occasion was formally announced. Victor Knox, National Park Service lead for establishing the Manhattan Project National Historical Park announced that the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement between the Department of Energy and the Department of Interior's National Park Service will be held in Washington, DC, on November 10, 2015. Official signing ceremonies will then be scheduled in Oak Ridge, TN, Los Alamos, NM, and Hanford, WA, a few days afterward.

This is huge, folks! That formal signing ceremony means **WE HAVE A NATIONAL PARK** in Oak Ridge! Pinch yourself! You are not dreaming, it is real! Now, what we do with it is up to us...

Getting that coveted National Park Service Arrowhead is the first step toward a potential for significantly increasing Heritage Tourism in Oak Ridge. Making sure we are ready to manage the likely increased number of potential visitors is important. Mayor Gooch stated that forcefully as the signing ceremony announcement was made indicating he wanted us to be ready when the park is formally established to have a park service presence for the visitors to see when they first arrive in Oak Ridge.

What is the connection to my tour on Saturday? Onkemetse Manaapelo and Maria Modise are from South Africa. They are here in Oak Ridge for a three week training course at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

They are employed by ESKOM which is a South Africa state owned utility. They are Nuclear Physicists in the Nuclear Analysis Department. ESKOM owns and operates Koeberg Nuclear Power plant located in Cape Town, South Africa. The plant has two 938 MWE units.

The training is for a software modelling and simulation suite (SCALE) for nuclear safety analysis and design developed and maintained by ORNL under contract with U. S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, DOE and the National Nuclear Security Administration to perform reactor physics, criticality safety, radiation shielding and spent fuel characterization for nuclear facilities and transportation/storage package designs: www.scale.ornl.gov.

Besides their day to day jobs as physicists, they are also part of an executive committee of SAYNPS (South African Young Nuclear Professionals Society) which is nonprofit organization whose mandate is to raise awareness about nuclear energy and applications amongst communities especially high school students. See: www.saynps.com

The vision of SAYNPS is to protect, sustain and promote safe usage of nuclear science and technology through empowerment of youth. Onkemetse said, "I hope to share and motivate young and aspiring scientists back in South Africa with the valuable knowledge that we have acquired so far."

I am pleased to be able to send back with Onkemetse and Maria packages from the Y-12 History Center that contain written material about our history and the Secret City DVD's, the Nuclear Family DVD's and Y-12 Anthology DVD's. It is good to know that these materials will be used to help High School students in South Africa better understand the history of Oak Ridge as they learn about nuclear energy.

Now that you understand who the people were that I took on the tour, let me tell you about the tour itself. Let me also explain that I hope you appreciate the EXTREMELY WIDE range of visitors we have here in Oak Ridge. From nuclear physicists, such as this tour, to retired military personnel, to families with young school children.

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What they all have in common is an intense interest in the history of the "Secret City/Science City" that is Oak Ridge. We have a tremendous story to tell.

I think it is worth noting that the only tour in town at this point, beside the step-on tours that the Oak Ridge Convention and Visitors Bureau arrange for tour buses coming to Oak Ridge, is the DOE Public Tour. Up until this year this tour had been limited to the summer months of June, July and August. I am proud to say I promoted the idea to DOE expand these tours and the DOE agreed. Beginning this year the number of tours has doubled. The participation in the tours has been really good for the first year of expanded tours.

Maybe the results of this year will show enough success that when the Manhattan Project National Historical Park becomes active, the tours can be extended further and modified to be even more effective based on their knowledge of how to best manage such things. The tours are but one thing I am sure the park service will want to examine for potential early successes for the park.

It is also worth noting that the DOE Public Tours run on the weekdays and NOT on the weekends. People such as the two I took on the tour on Saturday, are busy in training courses at ORNL, ORAU or Y-12 during the week and cannot take the tours. Maybe the Park Service will help us do weekend tours as well.

So, the tour started at the American Museum of Science and Energy parking lot and ended at the American Museum of Science and Energy. The first stop was the Y-12 History Center. Next we went to the Bull Run Steam Plant for a exterior view only (would be nice to include an inside tour option here).

The beautiful drive on Melton Lake Drive was next where I showed them the excellent rowing course where a number of rowers were present along with some people in kayaks and others standing on paddle boards. They also saw the heavily used greenway along the river where numerous runners, walkers, bike riders and even baby strollers could be seen...a really good example of what Oak Ridge has to offer.

As we headed to Jackson Square, I took them by many of the alphabet houses along Florida Avenue and even drove up Olney Lane before returning down the ridge via Georgia Avenue and passing world famous Big Ed's Pizza! The Farmers' Market across from Jackson Square was the next feature. When I pointed out Dean's Restaurant and Bakery, they said they had eaten there earlier in their stay in Oak Ridge.

As we drove by the Alexander Guest House, which is very near completion of the renovation, and the Chapel on the Hill, they asked many questions about the early days in Oak Ridge. These buildings are among our most notable structures remaining of the Manhattan Project.

Our next stop was at the Secret City Commemorative Walk where they spent a good deal of time reading all the substantial information contained there. We also took a short walk to the Oak Ridge Room in the Oak Ridge Public Library.

Along the drive west on the Oak Ridge Turnpike to the East Tennessee Technology Park's overlook, I was able to tell them about the later history of our city and how things have evolved over the years. The Gate House on the Turnpike offers a good opportunity for telling the story of opening the gates to the city. Too bad the building is locked. It would make a good stop on the way to show the history of K-25. Maybe I will see if I can borrow a key for that purpose...

As we neared K-25, I began to tell them of the history of the area prior to the Manhattan Project and stopped at the African Burial Ground. Here I was able to talk about the Gallaher Plantation and the Civil War era in East Tennessee. Of course, this led to a brief discussion of South Africa with regard to similarity to the history there.

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Finally we returned to the American Museum of Science and Energy where we toured the Oak Ridge History room, the Flattop House, the Y-12 room and spent a lot of time in the nuclear reactor demonstration areas as this is their area of highest interest, being nuclear physicists. The AMSE experience was an excellent cap on the entire tour of Oak Ridge.

One stop we did not explore on this tour was the Children's Museum of Oak Ridge. It has been a hit with the National Park Service personnel each time I have toured them through our city and the government sites. When we have included a stop there, the time goes by and the people on the tour are never ready to leave. It is definitely one of Oak Ridge's crown jewels and should be a spoke on the hub and spoke arrangement for the Manhattan Project National Historical Park.

As we plan to become the home of the Oak Ridge portion of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park, I think we must consider how to showcase our unique assets and tell our story through tours of our city including all aspects of our history, not just the government sites. Weekend tours will be necessary. We have to consider the amount of time it takes. We may need to create several shorter tours. We need an overall tour strategy!

It is time for us to all get creative in our thinking and get ready for the time (coming soon!) when that Park Service Arrowhead is a reality! Got ideas? We need input from as many people as we can get. Use social media, letters to the editors, contact city council, the mayor is interested as is the City Manager.

Help Oak Ridge get ready for the PARK!



Maria Modise, Onkemetse Manaapelo with me at the Oak Ridge Room of the Oak Ridge Public Library – photo by Teresa Fortney

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Maria and Onkemetse at the Secret City Commemorative Walk where they spent time learning the details of the seven years Oak Ridge was a “gated city”



Maria and Onkemetse at the American Museum of Science and Energy where they explored the Oak Ridge room, the Flat Top house and more

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Onkemetse really liked the nuclear reactor mock ups at AMSE – as a Nuclear Physicists, he could readily identify with them