

Karoo

2023

*Life lessons from the
Forgotten Highway*

101 CLASSICS!

FARM STALLS • BACK ROADS • PLACES TO STAY • THINGS TO DO
FESTIVALS • MUSEUMS • NATURE RESERVES • AND MORE!

HARDEMAN'S KAROO

Sleep in a restored farm cottage
or a glass house on a mountain!

LITTLE KAROO

Road trip heaven from
Barrydale to Uniondale

HOFMEYR

The town that took
its second chance

SPACE TRAVEL

Find solace in the silences of Hanover,
Murraysburg, Nieu-Bethesda and Graaff-Reinet



Montagu: Marchelle van Zyl, tour guide

Prince Albert: Sue Milton-Dean, plant ecologist

RSA R125
N\$125 (Namibia)





Duo X

Xtra, Xtreme, Xquisite

Swing-out patio / inverter / larger bed / more packing space / more charging power / water-level indicator / easy external access to cupboards and so much more...



SCAN ME

www.invader.co.za

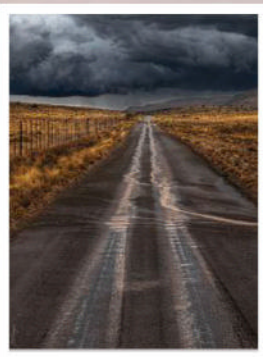


INVADER
Off-Road Campers

go! **Karoo**

2023

CONTENTS



COVER PICTURE
JAN-HENDRIK SWIEGERS
Instagram: @janhendrikswieg

The Sneeuweg road in the Murraysburg district, shortly after a thunderstorm in the summer of 2021.

6 LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

10 CHECK THIS!

When *riel* dancers get going, there will be dust!

12 COLUMN

Childhood holidays on a farm in the Little Karoo left an indelible impression on Sophia van Taak.

14 FORGOTTEN HIGHWAY

Centuries ago the first wagon trail slowly started snaking north from Tulbagh towards Kuruman. Willem van der Berg joined a unique expedition that traced part of this route.

22 LITTLE KAROO

Toast Coetzer checked out five great places to stay in and around Barrydale, Vanwyksdorp, Calitzdorp, Oudtshoorn and Uniondale – string them together for a perfect holiday!

32 HOFMEYR

Thanks to a caring community that dug deep in many ways, this Eastern Cape town has rediscovered its pride, writes Chris Marais.

40 PRINCE ALBERT

Join plant ecologist Sue Milton-Dean for a walk in the veld and be inspired by this Karoo treasure, says Sam Reinders.

44 HARDEMANS KAROO

Camp among koppies near Loxton, sleep in a “glass house” on the Nuweveld escarpment, settle in for a *kuier* in a stone cottage near Carnarvon – these and four other great farmstays were hand-picked by Willem van der Berg.

54 HEUNINGLAND KAROO EXPERIENCE TOUR

This guided, four-day tour in and around the Karoo National Park near Beaufort West takes you to places most tourists never get to see. Plus, you can test your 4x4, says Pierre Steyn.

62 MONTAGU

The cycling, smiling tour guide Marchelle van Zyl is a true storyteller, writes Jon Minster.

66 IN SEARCH OF SPACE

The Karoo has space to spare, but on a road trip between the

This page: Biesieslaagte, Carnarvon district (see page 46)

Previous page: Snow on the farm Dunedin, Beaufort West district, July 2020



districts of Hanover, Murraysburg, Nieu-Bethesda and Graaff-Reinet, Toast Coetzer discovers the inner space it can untwine too.

74 101 KAROO CLASSICS

Use our epic list to plan your next trip to the Karoo! Our team of journalists pooled their experience to bring you their favourite farm stalls, most scenic back roads, gnarliest gravel road passes and best places to stay. Find out which festivals and platteland museums to visit, where to buy great lamb chops for the braai, and much more.

76 MAP OF THE KAROO

On this map you'll find all the major towns, regions and roads covered in this guide. It includes the 101 things listed in our Karoo Classics section.

130 LETTER FROM CRADOCK

Clinton V. du Plessis writes us a poem from the dark streets of the Karoo.

*As the only girl
among my brother
and three cousins,
I quickly learnt how
to climb a windmill,
hunt Egyptian
geese and ride a
motorbike. Also, how
to drop-kick a rugby
ball and side-step
a Cape cobra.*

– Sophia van Taak, p 12

EDITOR'S LETTER

Where does the Karoo begin? Where does it end? These are lekker questions to ponder around a campfire somewhere near Williston in the Upper Karoo. Or is that the Hardemans Karoo? There are pieces of Karoo in the Free State, the Western Cape, the Eastern Cape and the Northern Cape. If you go by vegetation type, the Nama Karoo ecozone includes parts of southern Namibia, and the adjacent Succulent Karoo ecozone includes Namaqualand and the Richtersveld. (Visit onsknk.co.za for a map of all the Karoo regions.)

But I've never met a tourist who said they were going to the Karoo and meant Kamieskroon. So, for the purposes of this guide, we're focusing on the Karoo as most of our readers would know it. From the Tankwa in the west to the Camdeboo in the east, there's more than enough to keep you busy. You have the Little Karoo and the Great Karoo, with subtle variations in-between, like the Hardemans Karoo, the Koup and the Roggeveld. You can escape for a weekend or for a longer holiday. Who knows, maybe you'll buy a house in a Karoo town and move there permanently! You can walk in the veld, drive dirt roads, visit game reserves, *kuier* on guest farms – or just sit quietly on a stoep at dusk and listen to a windmill turning in the breeze.

The Karoo holds a special place in the psyche of many South Africans. It's about more than anchor bush, *ghaap* and Chinese lantern bush (*klapperbos*). The typical landscape features (windmills, koppies, plains, a deserted farmhouse) and the animal life we associate with the Karoo (springbok, dassie, pale chanting goshawk) – these things only tell half the story.

People who live in a city always long for somewhere else where life happens at a slower pace; a place where there are fewer people and you have more time for yourself. The Karoo is such a place – an oasis where you can recover. With this new guide, we want to show you great places to stay and things to do that will draw you to the heartbeat of the Karoo.

Our contributors all have a great love for the Karoo. Experienced travel journalists Chris Marais and Julienne du Toit are the authors of the book series *Karoo Keepsakes* and *Karoo Roads* (karoospace.co.za). Chris wrote about the resurrection of Hofmeyr (p 32) and Julienne did the bulk of our list of 101 Karoo Classics (p 74).

When Sam Reinders, former *go!* picture editor, isn't on assignment in places like Bangladesh and South Sudan, she calls Prince Albert home. Much of her personal work



PRIVATE GAME RESERVE
WILDEHONDEKLOOF

- Luxury accommodation
- Game Drives
- Walking Trails
- Swimming pool
- Klein Karoo warmth

Where peace finds you!

Contact us
info@whkloof.co.za
www.whkloof.co.za

is centred on the Karoo – on page 40 she introduces us to plant ecologist Sue Milton-Dean. Jon Minster, who often travels to the Karoo with his family (always with their bicycles on the roof rack), talks to Montagu tour guide Marchelle van Zyl (p 62). Before Willem van der Berg became a journalist, he farmed in the Karoo for a few years and also worked as a windmill mechanic. He was the perfect guy to report on the Forgotten Highway (p 14) and to find lekker overnight spots in the Hardemans Karoo (p 44).

And me? I was born in Cradock and often return to our farm there. Driving from Cape Town to Cradock means crossing almost the entire Karoo – whether you go through the Little Karoo or the Great Karoo via Laingsburg, Beaufort West and Aberdeen. The places next to those Karoo roads have become familiar sights to me over the years: physical landmarks but also markers on another, deeper journey.

May this first issue of *go! Karoo* also take you on a deeper journey. We hope you enjoy it!

TOAST

toast@gomag.co.za Instagram: @toastcards



Kransplaas is situated in the heart of the Great Karoo, in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. A mere 20km from the historical town, Graaff-Reinet, the 4th oldest town in South Africa. Kransplaas is an ideal overnight stop for long distance travellers or a getaway to rest, relax, refresh and recharge your batteries. Immerse yourself in the peace and solitude that only the Karoo can offer.

Guided Nature Walks | Birdwatching | Guided Game Drives | Stargazing | Clay Target Shooting
Marked Mountain Bike/Jogging Routes | Function Venue

FOR MORE INFORMATION & BOOKINGS:

T: 076 075 7272 | **E:** info@kransplaas.co.za | **W:** www.kransplaas.com





ON SALE!

The 2023 editions of *go! Hiking* and *go! Namibia* are now available. Buy your copies online at media24shop.com

EFT and credit card options are available.

For enquiries, e-mail yumna.tofey@media24.com or call 021 406 2205. Digital copies available at zinio.com or magzter.com

go! Karoo

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF (WEG & GO): PIERRE STEYN

EDITOR *GO KAROO* 2023: TOAST COETZER

COPY EDITORS: MARIJCKE DODDS, MARTINETTE LOUW

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR: JON MINSTER

CARTOGRAPHER: FRANÇOIS HAASBROEK

ART DIRECTOR: LYNNE FRASER

JOURNALISTS: CHRIS MARAIS, JULIENNE DU TOIT, WILLEM VAN DER BERG, SAM REINDERS, EVAN NAUDÉ, KYRA TARR

MEDIA24

CEO MEDIA24: ISHMET DAVIDSON

GENERAL MANAGER – MEDIA24 LIFESTYLE & NEWS: MINETTE FERREIRA

MEDIA24 LIFESTYLE CFO: JAMEELAH CONWAY

FINANCIAL MANAGER: MELANIE LEEMAN

DIVISIONAL OPERATIONS MANAGER: EDWINA LYNERS

CIRCULATION MANAGER: ARMAND KASSELMAN

armand.kasselman@onthedot.co.za

PRODUCTION MANAGER: WENDY ADAMS

ADVERTISING SALES

HEAD OF ADVERTISING: DANIE NELL

danie.nell@media24.com 082 859 0542

KEY ACCOUNT MANAGERS: SHARLENE SMITH

sharlene.smith@media24.com 083 583 1604

SANETHA MEINTJIES

sanetha.meintjies@media24.com 082 957 9747

MEDIA24 LIFESTYLE CREATE STUDIO

CREATIVE DIRECTOR: MICHAEL DE BEER

COMMERCIAL MANAGING EDITOR: GERDA ENGELBRECHT

MARKETING MANAGER: ANDILE NKOSI Andile.Nkosi@media24.com

MEDIA24 DIVERSE REVENUE

GROWTH MANAGER: LISE VAN BREDA lise.coetsee@media24.com

HEAD OF DIVERSE PROJECTS: FRANÇOIS MALAN

DESIGNER – ADVERTISING: ELAINE SCHOEMAN

COPY EDITOR – ADVERTISING: BRIGITTE BLANCKENBERG

SHOP QUERIES: YUMNA TOFEY

yumna.tofey@media24.com 021 406 2205

SUBSCRIPTIONS, RENEWALS AND QUERIES

FOR THE PRINTED MAGAZINE:

087 353 1300 | 087 353 1333 (WhatsApp only) |

086 296 6681 | +27 21 065 0033 | subs@media24.com

"gosubs" to 32361 (R1,50 per SMS)

FOR THE DIGITAL MAGAZINE: zinio.com magzter.com

WHERE TO FIND US

CONTACT: YUMNA TOFEY yumna.tofey@media24.com 021 406 2205

CAPE TOWN POSTAL ADDRESS: PO Box 740, Cape Town, 8000

JOHANNESBURG POSTAL ADDRESS: PO Box 785266, Sandton, 2146



Published by Media24, a division of Naspers, 40 Heerengracht, Cape Town, 8001

WE'LL TAKE YOU TO THE **MOUNTAINS**

UP THE MIGHTY **SWARTBERG**
THROUGH THE CURIOUS **KLEIN KAROO**
OVER THE MAGICAL **MONTAGU PASS**

14 October 2023

Prince Albert to George | Western Cape

Gravel | Mountain | E-Bikes (only on the 50 Miler)

*Choose your bike and distance to conquer a
monumental race over two national monuments
exploring three geographical areas*

www.princegeorge.co.za



165km | 2500m

75km | 1000m



PROUDLY ANOTHER DRYLAND EVENT



PRINCE GEORGE

MONUMENTAL 100 MILER

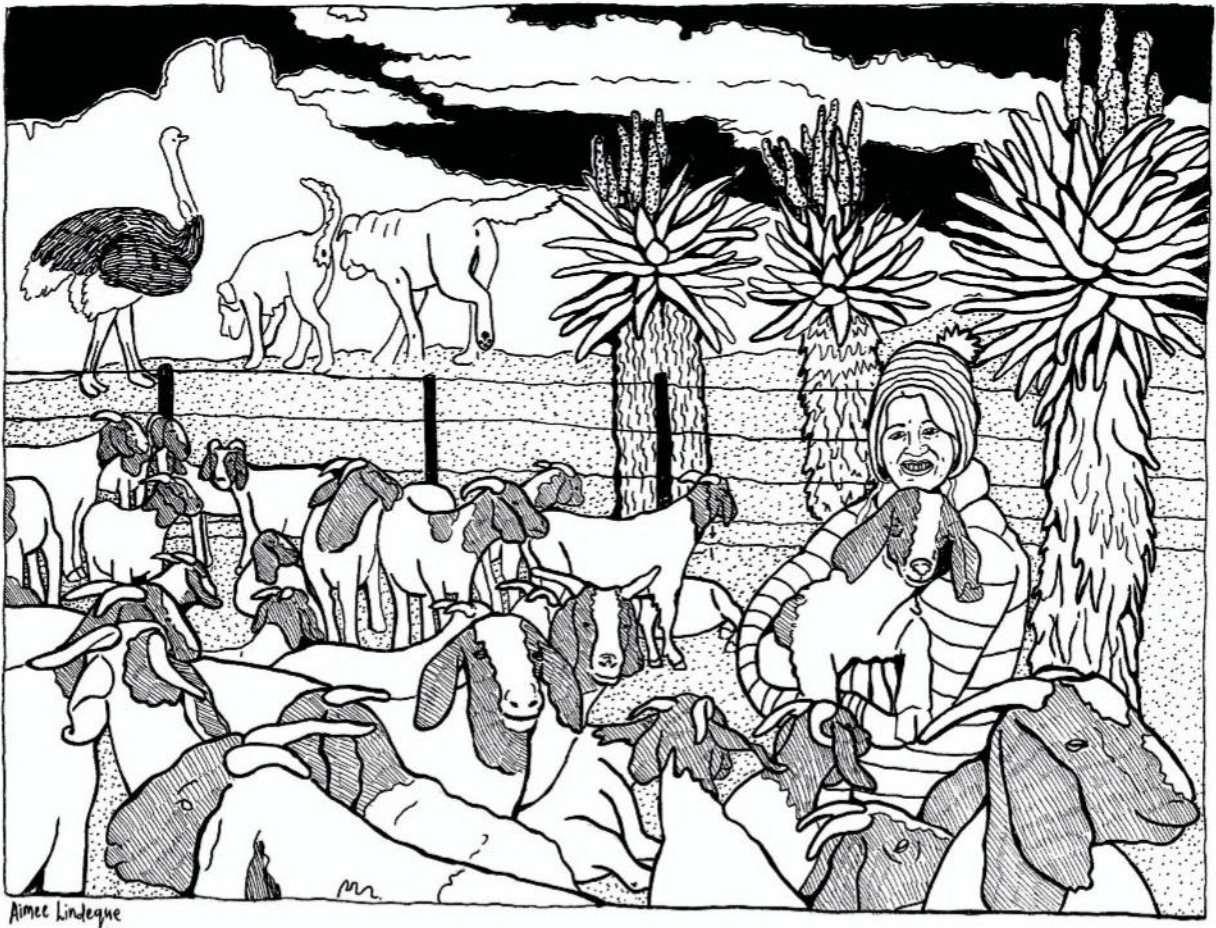
CHECK THIS!

If you're lucky, you might catch a *rieldans* display when you visit a Karoo town. These two are Monique Conradie and Zanadann van Rooi from the Prince Albert Vastrappers, photographed at the Saturday market in Prince Albert.

PICTURE **SAM REINDERS**







Back to the heartland

When life gets too heavy, **Sophia van Taak** heads to the Karoo, unplugs everything with a screen and rediscovers the things that really matter.

ILLUSTRATION AIMEE LINDEQUE

Do you sometimes fantasise about digging a small grave in the garden and burying your phone? Then you need to spend time in the Karoo. Because unlike everything online, the Karoo is not pushy. It asks almost nothing but gives you exactly what you need.

The emptiness of South Africa's interior has had an enigmatic pull on

me for as long as I can remember. It's as if my roots aren't really sunk into the moist Boland soil (I grew up in Paarl) but are rather longing for a dry donga.

My mother's family farms in the Karoo. As a child, I couldn't pack my bags fast enough for a farm visit at the end of the school term. Every day was an adventure on Mond-van-Pietsrivier near Ladismith. As the only girl among my brother and three cousins, I quickly learnt how to climb a windmill, hunt Egyptian

geese and ride a motorbike. Also, how to drop-kick a rugby ball and side-step a Cape cobra...

We explored from sunrise every day. The animal camps closest to the farmstead, like Oom-Bird-se-kampie, held the breeding ostrich pairs. The juvenile ostriches were kept in the field next to the pear trees. The koppie on the other side of Doringkloof was called "Oorkant" – that's where the baler, rake and slaughtering pole stood around the ruins of our great-grandparents'

house. And you could never just climb over the fence at Damkampie: Out of respect, we always first pulled up weeds around the graves of our ancestors in the cemetery. Witvlakte, with its brackish soil, was mostly used for grazing. This was also where we looked for jackal tracks in the salty crust. Sometimes we'd wander so far and so deep into the Ranteveld that we didn't know which way the farmyard was any more...

As we played, I got to know the Karoo in all its seasons. We were wild and free and we'd often only remember to come home once the sun had set behind the koppies. As we ran back through the grey evening, with a dusty dog at our heels, my child's heart was already experiencing how the open plains, so fresh and so ancient, can charm you with their bleak beauty.

It doesn't matter which part of the Karoo you lost your heart to. Maybe you first felt truly free when you crept out of your tent in the Tankwa; or the night sky of the Roggeveld made you cry warm tears one cold night. Maybe the flat-topped koppies around Middelburg made you feel like you were driving through a postcard; maybe you were in the Upper Karoo near Vosburg at just the right time to see the three-thorns in bloom. Or maybe your imagination ran wild in a remote cottage in the Moordenaars Karoo. During those childhood holidays on the farm, I gave my heart to the Little Karoo.

The Little Karoo is between the Anysberg, Warmwaterberg and Touwsberg mountains in the west, the Langeberg and Outeniquas in the south, the Klein-Swartberg and Groot-Swartberg in the north, and the Baviaanskloof in the east. You won't find the big sheep farms of the Great Karoo here, but rather smaller

farms with a mix of ostrich, boer goats, onions, stone fruit, almonds and lucerne. The fruit farms might at first seem out of place, but the orchards are planted at the base of the mountain slopes where there's more water – that's also why towns like Montagu, Ladismith, Calitzdorp and De Rust developed where they did. Even the tiny Vanwyksdorp has a permanent water source in the Rooiberg.

In the middle of the Little Karoo – south-west of Ladismith, where the farm of my childhood is located – there's a dry patch where you watch rain showers falling everywhere else with envy. When it's your turn to irrigate your fields, the water comes from far away – if it comes. You need good rain on the Komsberg escarpment near Sutherland to the north; enough for the Buffels River at Laingsburg to pick up speed and fill the Floriskraal Dam so the sluices can be opened and the water can flow along Buffelspoort through the Swartberg. If you're lucky, the stream will get a boost when the Touws River joins up with it from the west, and the Groot River will come down in spate. The river will carve its way through slabs of rock to where it joins up with the Gourits River and finally enters the sea at Vleesbaai. And every farmer along the way will wait and hope for enough water to sow lucerne.

But as there are dry years, there are lush years, too. Years when useless golden spurge and devil's thorn make way for anchor karoo bush on which small livestock can feast until they're fat. When farmers take courage.

When one rain shower follows another, the overgrown kloofs are flushed open with a clatter of river stones. On the shaded sides of koppies, evening flowers open their sweet, white cups at dusk; cancer

bush puffs up its red pods; the coral-pink flowers of pig's ears dance on tall stems; purple-white wonders appear among the spiky leaves of the babiana plant; vygies and quagga mesemb cover the slopes; and blushing weeping boer-bean trees dot the veld like red beach umbrellas.

When these scenes from my childhood appear in my dreams, I long for all the other beautiful Little Karoo things, like the coppery cliffs of Seweweekspoort, mysterious Towerkop shrouded in winter snow, the wind whistling through the reeds around the pool in the Groot River where I learnt to swim...

I roll the sweet seeds of a prickly pear on my tongue, crush the fruit of a pepper tree so the aroma clings to my palms, and press my cheek to the velvety head of a boer goat kid. I feel the specific weight of a bale of lucerne in my lower back, and how the string digs into my fingers as I pick it up; the smooth shell of an ostrich egg and the prickly feathers of the chick that hatched from it.

I remember us decorating the farmhouse for the festive season, using branches from a Chinese lantern tree (*klapperbos*) propped up in old milk cans and yellow sweet-thorn pods on the table.

And I remember how the furthest mountains would turn shades of blue in the late afternoon, going from midnight blue to royal blue and a blue the same colour as a flame closest to the head of a match. Further back, they'd become steel blue, then faded denim blue and even something smokier, like a slate blue.

I can hear the booming call of a male ostrich deep in the night; taste the tea made with borehole water; snap twigs for a braai in the veld and guide a bottle teat into the mouth of a lamb.

That's when I know: It's time to go back.



Gravel (time) travel

Roads have stories to tell. On the so-called Forgotten Highway between Tulbagh and Kuruman, you'll have enough time to ponder them all. We joined up with an eccentric expedition tracing the history of the Karoo.

WORDS & PICTURES **WILLEM VAN DER BERG**

Piet Coetzer and his horse-drawn cart on the Pampoenpoort road between Loxton and Vosburg in the Northern Cape.



FORGOTTEN HIGHWAY

The Karoo is so old that we can't know everything that happened here. Only stones in the veld can give us some hints. Near Fraserburg you can touch the petrified tracks left by ancient animals. On the farm Springbokoog near Vanwyksvlei, Bushmen etched their stories of elephants, lions and rhinos into the black rock. In the Hardemans Karoo, you can see corbelled houses like stone igloos left by the trek farmers.

We remember so little of the many lives lived in the Karoo. The people and animals are long forgotten, but the routes they trod still keep us on course.

That's why Piet Coetzer decided to honour these old routes. Piet, a farmer and horse breeder from Senekal in the Free State, harnessed six of his black Vlaamperd horses to a cart in 2021 and drove it from Hopetown to Ceres, following a coach route pioneered in the 1870s by the Gibson brothers during the diamond rush in Kimberley. The Gibsons' transport service later became known as the Red Star Line.

In October 2022, Piet and his horses set out again, this time on the so-called Forgotten Highway. From the mid-1700s, hunters, trek farmers and other settlers from the Cape started to explore the vast interior of South Africa. Traders peddled their wares to the Bushmen, Tswana, Xhosa and Griquas – themselves descendants of people who had left the Cape

in search of a new beginning.

Farmers settled further and further north, and the borders of the colony moved with them. In 1801, the Riet River between Sutherland and Fraserburg was the northern border. Ten years later it was the Sak River between Fraserburg and Loxton. Over time, routes to these far-flung areas were established and by the end of the 1700s, the route from Tulbagh to Kuruman (where the Moffat mission station was built in the early 1800s) developed into a "highway".

This highway, made by coaches and ox wagons, often followed the trails left by eland and springbok. Piet thought it was important to commemorate the route by driving it in a horse cart. He was joined on his expedition by his Free State team: Heinrich Naudé, Skoene Seheta, Papi Mofokeng, TT Schadrack and Kai the sausage dog.

The cart and horses were transported to Sutherland in bakkies and trailers and the team departed from there. (Piet's cart dates from the 1960s; it was built by Du Plessis Wagons in Ficksburg.)

Six days later, when my friend Conrad Bornman and I catch up with them, they're already on the farm Rietfontein, owned by Carlo and Martiné Nolte, between Loxton and Vosburg. We arrive at last light and find people gathered in front of the shearing shed in a semicircle, lighting a fire. The expedition has gained new members along the way. Three Bushmanlanders joined in their own cart at Fraserburg: Bossie de Vries, Sakkie van Niekerk and

Lucas Williams from Brandvlei; and their Boerperde Martha and Douglas.

"We like riding in the horse cart," Bossie tells me later. "In spring we usually tour through Namaqualand in our carts to see the flowers. When we heard about Piet and his expedition, we decided that we'd join him for a section."

If you think a braai-side debate about the best bakkie can get intense, you've never been on a horse-cart trip! The Bushmanlanders have to defend poor Martha and Douglas against their arresting Vlaamperd counterparts: Minister, Tom, Kimon, Karnet, Kristal and Klara.

Sakkie gets in the last dig: He tells us how excited the two Nolte farm kids, Luné (8) and CJ (6), were when they heard they could ride with Piet for a while.

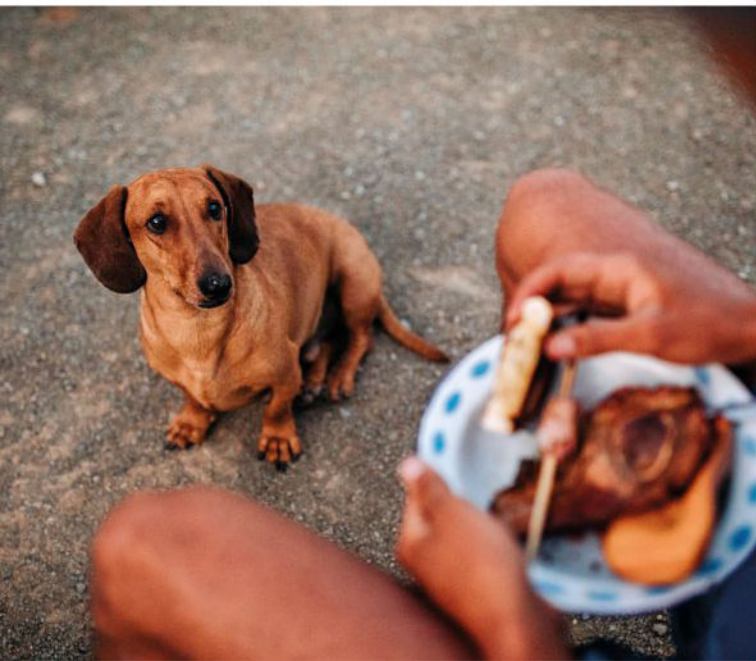
"They said, 'Mama, we're going to ride on a *donkiekar!*'"

The group sleeps in the shearing shed and the acoustics create a snoring symphony of the likes you've never heard before. Conrad and I pitch our tent outside rather, under stars that flicker like candlelight in thousands of small windows.

Rusks are dunked in coffee early the next morning while everyone seeks out the first pools of sunlight. How many rusks have been eaten at sunrise next to this road in the past, I wonder, with an unknown number of kilometres ahead and the empty Karoo stretching all around?

We know more than those early travellers did: Our plan is to drive 40 km to the farm Pampoenpoort,

Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Bushmanland horse Martha is at her happiest in the Karoo. Heinrich Naudé shows the horses some appreciation after a hard day's work. Minister and Karnet are Piet Coetzer's long-distance athletes – by the end of the journey they'd completed 1 300 km through the Karoo together. Around here, kids like Marco Coreejes still know about old traditions like goat's milk fresh from the source. The Bushmanland team at a trot. Kai the sausage dog waits patiently for his portion of braai.



FORGOTTEN HIGHWAY

following the neat dirt road lined with jackal-proof fences on both sides.

Although the landscape next to the Forgotten Highway now has the odd house with satellite Wi-Fi, solar power and HD TV, there are still sections where the veld gazes up at the fresh blue sky in silence. I hope it stays that way for a long time, because there are very few spaces left where you can breathe.

Or do we just need to move with the right horsepower? The rhythmic sound of the horses' hoofs on the ground is so soothing that the meerkats don't scatter as we approach; they sit up and watch. Even the pale chanting goshawks slow their flight.

"That's exactly why I like to travel with my horses and cart," says Piet behind the reins. "Everything around me gets bigger and I feel small. I can hear nature talking to me."

Above his head, in an arch against the canopy of the cart, are three names painted in gold: Kyla, Jack, Lucy.

"My son's three children. My grandchildren," he says. "They're all Australians now. They'll probably never know the Karoo. Having their names here is the closest I can bring them to this place."

They don't come to South Africa to visit and he misses them terribly.

"I tried to live there for a while. *Nee, wat, dis 'n simpel plek!* It doesn't feel real. You look at the trees and there's not a single one that looks like a camel thorn. Nowhere smells like the Free State in autumn. They have dunes, but it's not the Kalahari."

That's why Piet takes so many

photos for his grandchildren – so they can see their names in Africa. This continent has the only real Karoo in the whole world.

It's the afternoon and getting hotter. At Pampoenpoort, the horses are given a rest and a well-earned hose-down. There are old stories and wisdoms still blowing around these koppies, and some of these values and ways of life have taken root in the people who now live here: Marnus and Marlé Coreejas, the farm managers, and their two sons, both of whom come and greet the visitors with a firm handshake.

"Hallo oom, ek is Marco."

"Hallo oom, ek is Christo."

They ask us how we are and tell us they'll ride with us on their own horses the next day. Marco is six and Christo is only four, but both have been in the saddle much longer than most adults ever will. Late in the afternoon, they help their dad herd the milch goats to the shed and each fills a bucket with milk so their mom can make butter and yoghurt.

Marlé is also the principal of the small school on the farm. In these classrooms, you grow up with the seasons. Things like drought, cumulonimbus clouds, wind direction and the phases of the moon are not just abstract concepts to learn – you live them every day. Fewer and fewer children are growing up like Marco, Christo and the 40 other pupils at the Pampoenpoort school.

And where else do you still find guys like Christo "Die Bom" Kock, who can tame any wild horse? Christo works at Pampoenpoort but

his name is well known on almost every farm in the Karoo with horses.

"People are scared of horses because they don't know if they can trust them," he says. "That's nonsense. *People* are the untrustworthy ones! You have to show a horse that it can trust *you*. That you won't hurt it or just use and take. A horse can sense duplicity – it can feel if you think you belong there when you climb onto its back. Then it will throw you off. Look a horse in the eye and lie, and you'll never rest easy in the saddle."

The morning is still fresh when the horses are harnessed and saddled. Piet is in a hurry. He doesn't want his black horses working in the white-hot afternoon sun.

"Kom, kom, there's no point getting up at 5 am if you're only really awake at 9 am!"

He keeps Minister and Karnet to the side. Along with last year's expedition, they've just ticked over a thousand kilometres.

"Dankie, julle. Ek is lief vir julle," he whispers, leaning his forehead against theirs.

The sun rises in the dust kicked up by our convoy. We head to Carnarvon. The kids from Rietfontein, Luné and CJ, catch another ride on Piet's "donkey cart". They're such big fans that they built their own horse cart with Lego last night.

We take a peek at the old cemetery on the farm Beyersfontein. Lots of people met their end in the mid-1800s, as if a great plague had struck. On 28 September 1897, for example, Maria Elizabeth Lyon died aged 31,

"Look a horse in the eye and lie, and you'll never rest easy in the saddle..."

– Christo Kock

Christo Kock, the horse whisperer of the Karoo, knows the secret to a healthy relationship between man and beast: mutual trust.



FORGOTTEN HIGHWAY

as did her son who had only lived for two days.

“It wasn’t easy to grow up – or to grow old – in those years,” Bossie says in his thick Bushmanland accent. “But back then you didn’t have to worry about the well-being of the planet as much...”

Conrad and I say goodbye and we go our own way. Bossie’s words stay with me, as does the slow pace of the Forgotten Highway. Maybe it’s good to remember the old people and places every now and then – to

look back so that you can see where things came from, and maybe see where they’re going. To make sure you’re on the right track.

In the end, Piet Coetzer and his team covered 640 km in 14 days. Their journey ended in Griquatown. He plans to attempt another “forgotten” route in October 2023. This time he’ll travel from Philippolis to Williston via Douglas and Prieska – about 1 000 km. Contact him to find out more, or to join the expedition: 073 852 7420

Opposite, clockwise from top left: Bossie de Vries reads the names of people who have long since become part of Beyersfontein’s soil. At the time of this expedition, the Karoo was still green and wet following a good rainy season. The world is a better place when you’re travelling by horse cart along a forgotten dirt road.

WHERE WAS THE FORGOTTEN HIGHWAY?

The explorer William Burchell trekked along this route in 1811 and took detailed notes of his journey. This is how we know that the route ran from Ceres, through the Karoo Poort (where the R46, R355 and R356 meet), to the Tankwa. The night sky was so bright that Burchell could travel by starlight.

He struggled up Verlatekloof (R354) in the rain to reach the top of the Roggeveld Plateau and travelled past Sutherland and Fraserburg (roughly following the route of the modern R356) to the Sak River. On the other side of the river was “the land of the Bushmen”, as Burchell wrote in his diary. He met many Bushman families on his journey to Carnarvon, then known as Schietfontein.

After that, he passed through arid plains to the Gariep River, to a site where Prieska probably is now. And from there he went to Griquatown (then known as Klaarwater), where he spent some time before continuing north.

The distance from Tulbagh (where the route actually started) to Kuruman is about 1 000 km on modern roads that follow a similar route. A tourism route is currently being developed and supported by the Karoo Development Foundation (KDF). This trust works towards sustainable socio-economic development in the Karoo.

KDF was involved with Piet Coetzer’s 2022 Forgotten Highway expedition and helped to cover his expenses and did the marketing. Professor Doreen Atkinson, a KDF trustee, hopes that the Forgotten Highway will bring more tourists to the towns along the route.

More info: [karooofoundation.co.za](https://www.karooofoundation.co.za) – click “Forgotten Highway” under “Projects”

You’ll find a map and PDF guide, which you can download for free.

You can e-mail professor Atkinson at doreen@karooofoundation.co.za

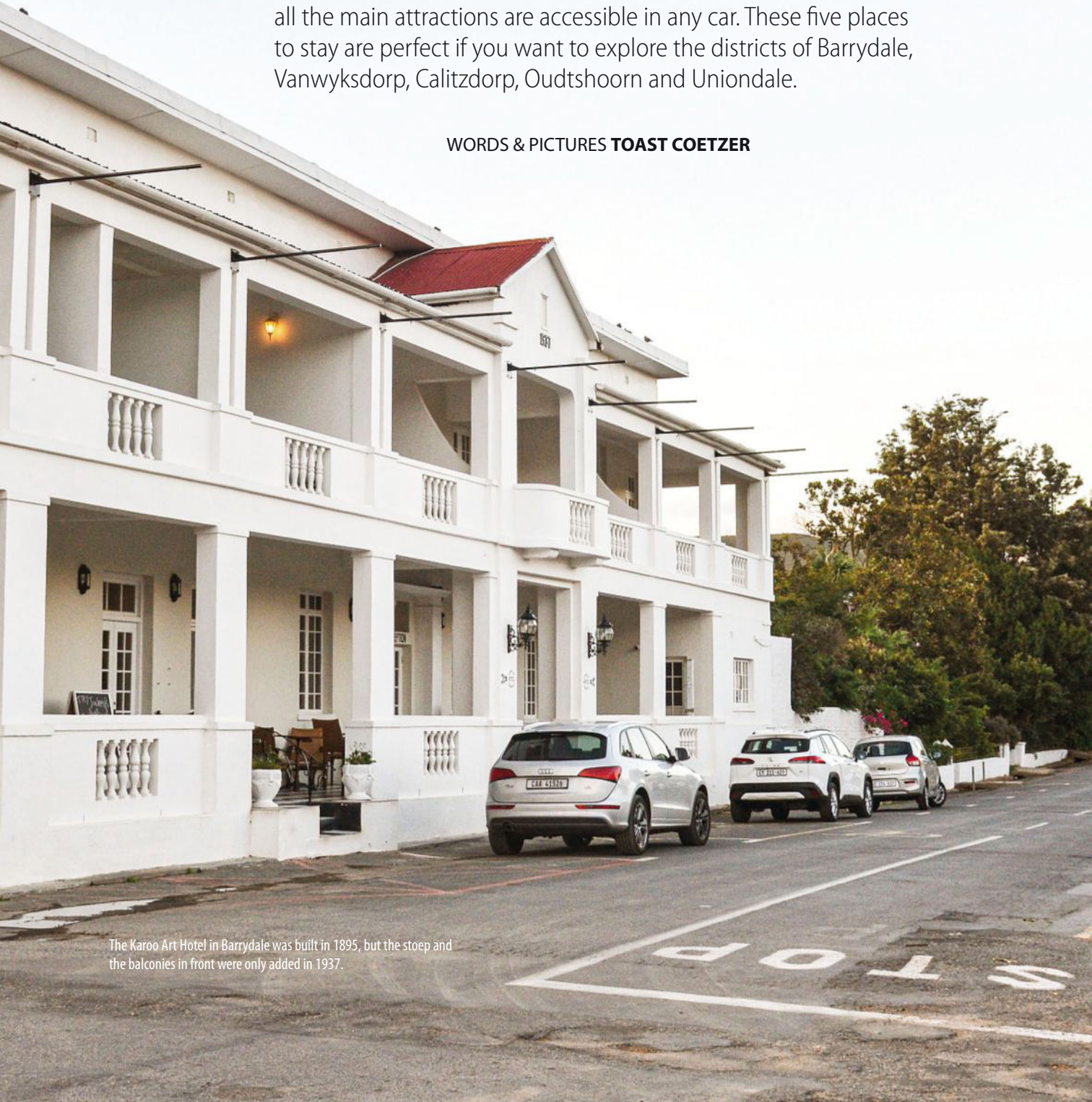




Road trip rapture

The Little Karoo is one of the best self-drive destinations in South Africa. Route 62 connects most of the towns and almost all the main attractions are accessible in any car. These five places to stay are perfect if you want to explore the districts of Barrydale, Vanwyksdorp, Calitzdorp, Oudtshoorn and Uniondale.

WORDS & PICTURES **TOAST COETZER**



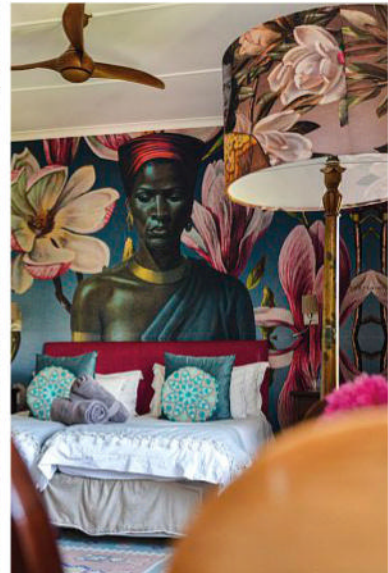
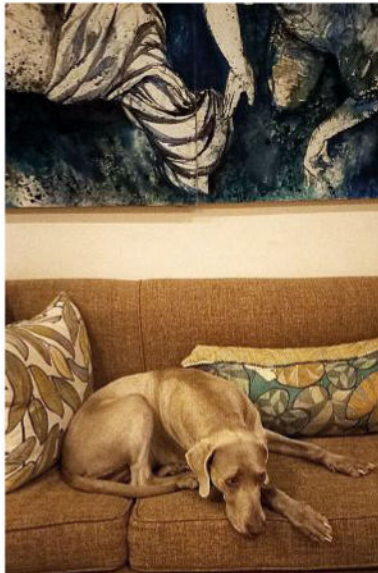
The Karoo Art Hotel in Barrydale was built in 1895, but the stoep and the balconies in front were only added in 1937.

BARRYDALE

There are a bunch of eateries next to the R62: Diesel & Crème (☎ [074 180 7241](tel:0741807241)), Karoo Daisy (☎ [028 572 1019](tel:0285721019)), The Country Pumpkin (☎ [060 316 3229](tel:0603163229)), and MUD (☎ [082 775 980](tel:082775980)), where you can buy products from Barrydale Hand Weavers. Mez Karoo Kitchen (☎ [082 775 980](tel:082775980)) is at 24 Van Riebeeck Street – go there for delicious Mediterranean dishes.

Barrydale has antique and art shops and you can explore the town's dirt streets on foot and start to dream about your own place in the Karoo...

More info: ☎ barrydale.org.za



Karoo Art Hotel

This hotel was renovated in 2021 by Rick and Sue Melvill and their team. "It took four months of restoration work," says manager Wayne Robinson. "Everything was redone, from the front of the hotel to the back, floors to ceilings."

Now it's a colourful place brimming with character and creativity. "We're a part of the community and want to introduce our guests to our people and their talents," says Wayne. "The idea is to promote the work of local artists. At the moment there are works from four or five artists on display, which are available to buy."

The "Art" in the hotel's name refers to more than paintings. "Rick always tells me it's also about 'the art of joy,'" says Wayne. "In a way, everything here is 'art' – it's about the art of baking, of slow-cooking, pouring a cocktail in the bar..."

The 17 hotel rooms each have their own artsy flair – one wall in the room I stayed in, the Magnolia Room, is covered in a giant print of Tretchikoff's Zulu Girl (pictured, above right).

The rooms offer similar luxuries, they just differ in size. The Klein Karoo en suite rooms start at R860 per person sharing; Groot Karoo from R1 130 per person sharing; Garden Suite from R1 265 per person sharing – it's at the back of the garden; you basically have your own unit. The Garden Suite and another room called The Dog Box are pet-friendly.

All rates include breakfast and are valid from May to August 2024, which is the low season. The rates go up in other months. Children under 7 stay for free, and children aged 7 – 11 get a discount.

What else? There's safe parking on the premises and a swimming pool in the back garden. All meals are served here and there's also a bakery (sourdough, croissants...) and a coffee shop if you just want to have a look around. The bar has plenty of character – it feels like an old town bar with a modern twist.

The hotel is the only eatery in town that's open every day, from 7.30 am to 10 pm. Grab a table in the dining room or eat in the bar area.

The hotel hosts a variety of events including painting and writing workshops and even Harley-Davidson gatherings – visit their website for more.

Address: 30 Van Riebeeck Street, Barrydale

Contact: ☎ [066 189 7475](tel:0661897475); ✉ reservations@karooarthotel.co.za; ✉ karooarthotel.co.za



Barman Mickyle Erasmus mixes a Fynbos Sunset cocktail.

DO THIS

The Karoo Art Hotel is the meeting place of the "Birrydale" swim club – they start their day with a refreshing plunge in a cold river pool next to Tradouw Pass. Contact Mickey Mentz (☎ [083 985 0865](tel:0839850865)) if you want to join. Bring your swimming costume, a towel... and your slippers! At the time of going to print, Mickey – who moved to Barrydale in 2019 – had taken the plunge almost 400 times!

VANWYKSDORP

What? You've never been to Vanwyksdorp? It's not on the R62, which is why it has remained invisible to many tourists... But it's only 45 km south of Ladismith and accessible on a good dirt road.

The remoteness of the area and its rugged landscape (and the Groot River) attract people who want to move to the platteland for some real peace and quiet. It's becoming a popular spot to hide away from the world.

More info: [vanwyksdorptourism.com](https://www.vanwyksdorptourism.com)

The Dutch Reformed church in Vanwyksdorp has been holding services since 1908.



Retha Buitendach, Buffelfontein Gallery

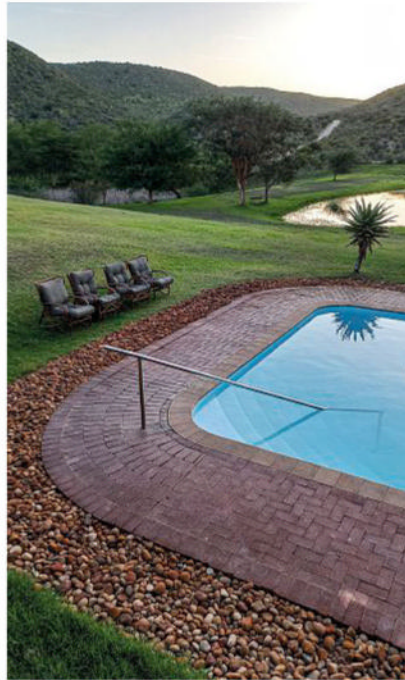


Jonean de Wee, Vanwyksdorp Mall



Rooiberg Lodge

Rooiberg Lodge



Manager Rudi du Plessis and her husband, Daniel, assistant general manager at Rooiberg Lodge.

Rooiberg Lodge

This lodge is hidden among the knuckles of the Rooiberg range. The vegetation type here is called guarri-spekboomveld – dense stands of spekboom cover the slopes and you'll also see small-leaved guarri bushes.

Most of the accommodation options have views of a small dam where you can sometimes see yellow-billed duck, African spoonbill and other waterbirds – maybe even a nyala or a zebra. Manager Rudi du Plessis and her capable team keep the premises and facilities in tip-top shape.

The thatched chalets start at R1 840 per night for two people self-catering, or R2 050 per night for two people with breakfast.

The backpacker-style Loft Rooms offer value for money for bigger groups: from R250 per person. These rooms are aimed at people who do motorcycle tours on the dirt roads in the area. Ask about their special offers for bikers.

The Suites are on a different slope – they overlook the dam but also have views to the south where the Langeberg rests in the distance. From R1 460 per night for two people with breakfast.

Camping costs R150 per person – each stand has lawn, a braai, a power point and a picnic table. These are the low-season rates for 2024 – valid from March next year. They offer discounts for pensioners and it's also more affordable when you book for three nights or more.

What else? The lodge is inside the 60 km² Assegaay Bosch Nature Reserve. You can go on a guided game drive (R300 per person) and look for wildlife like giraffe and kudu. Mont Rouge Olive Estate is also inside the reserve – a visit costs R250 per person. (All reserve activities must be booked beforehand.) Hiking trails depart from the lodge and take walkers through spekboomveld where you can also see magnificent aloes. Bring your mountain bike – they have great trails.

Day visitors are welcome at the restaurant – book beforehand. I enjoyed the chili cheese burger with sweet potato chips (R175). Mont Rouge products are also sold at Rooiberg – a 300 g jar of olives costs R60.

Where? 12 km east of Vanwyksdorp.

Contact: ☎ 087 802 3578; 📧 rooiberglodge.co.za

DO THIS

There's nothing better than a little platteland shop that calls itself a "mall"! But the **Vanwyksdorp Mall** is not entirely tongue-in-cheek – you really *can* buy almost anything here. Did you forget your takkies at home? Do you need a basin for your bathroom? A piece of drain pipe? A pair of trousers? Knitting wool? Fruit? No problem!

Manager Jonean de Wee was doing the books on her laptop when I dropped by. Buy padkos like mixed dried fruit (R50), a small packet of biscuits (R30) or rusks (R60). I left with home-made ginger beer (R25).

The **Buffelfontein Gallery** (and coffee shop) is opposite the mall and sells works by local artists. I bought a nice T-shirt (R360) with a design by Retha Buitendach on the front.

Opening times: Mall open weekdays from 8 am to 5 pm; weekends from 9 am to 1 pm. Buffelfontein Gallery open Fridays and Saturdays from 10 am to 2 pm; Sundays from 10 am to 3 pm. (They're also open Tuesday to Thursday during school holidays from 10 am to 2 pm.)

Where? If you drive around Vanwyksdorp looking for the mall or the gallery for more than 10 minutes, you're in the wrong town...

Contact: Mall ☎ 082 978 4863 (Heidi); Buffelfontein Gallery ☎ 084 301 0509 (Retha); 📧 buffelfonteinart@gmail.com



CALITZDORP

Calitzdorp was established in the 1850s when two Calitz brothers donated land to build a church. It's situated where the Gamka River exits the Swartberg and joins up with the smaller Nels River. Vineyards are grown in the area and Calitzdorp is also the uncontested port capital of South Africa.

There's a unpretentiousness about Calitzdorp that I like. The R62 cuts through town, but don't just speed through. Have a meal at Die Bakhuis (next to the R62, just west of the bridge over the Nels River; ☎ 064 961 7574) – it's known for its pizzas – or drink coffee and browse garden decor at Calitzdorp Tuinateljee (30 Voortrekker Street; ☎ 072 963 5673).

More info: 📍 calitzdorp.co.za

Red Stone Hills

This photogenic place is on one of the Little Karoo's first-class back roads: the Groenfontein Road (see #94 on our 101 Karoo Classics list, p 114), which is also called the Kruisrivier Road by the time it reaches Red Stone Hills. The eponymous red ridges were formed more than 100 million years ago when ancient rivers deposited a sediment of pebbles and gravel: "conglomerate", as the geologists call it.

You can pick one of eight different self-catering units – they all have a view of the red hills. Each unit has a story: Hanepoot Cottage used to be a small shop, and Aloe Gardens is a renovated labourer's cottage. If you're on a couple's breakaway, the latter is a good option (R940 per night for two people). A small family will like Bird's Nest (R1 510 per night for four people), which dates from 1876. The bigger Bushman Cottage, built in 1888, starts at R550 per person sharing, or R2 360 per night if you fill it with six people. Children aged 3 – 10 get a discount.

What else? The farm is a nature-lover's dream, says owner Petro Potgieter. Red Stone Hills is one of environmentalist Dave Pepler's favourite places. Walk the Enon Trail (6,5 km; it starts at reception) or the shorter Bushman Trail (5 km), which starts behind Bushman Cottage. Arrange beforehand if you want to explore the farm on horseback (R350 per person per hour). See if you can spot the booted eagles that breed in the area.

Where? About 20 km east of Calitzdorp.

Contact: ☎ 072 901 5654 (Petro); 📍 redstone.co.za

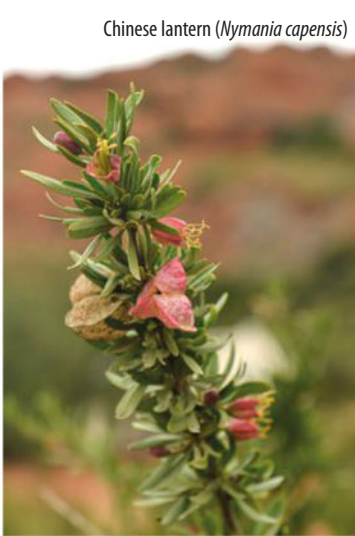
LITTLE KAROO



A species of *Cotyledon*



Petro Potgieter



Chinese lantern (*Nymania capensis*)



Calitzdorp



The road between Rooiberg Pass and Vanwyksdorp.

DO THIS

You've driven Swartberg Pass and Seweweekspoort, but what about **Rooiberg Pass**? Head south of Calitzdorp along the Gamka River – after about 12 km a dirt road turns off to the right and soon you'll start to climb the pass.

In dry conditions you won't need a 4x4, but the pass is rugged in places so a bakkie or SUV will be best. Follow the road to Vanwyksdorp (58 km) and return to the R62 and Calitzdorp via Ladismith and the Huisrivier Pass. It's a lekker half-day outing.



De Zeekoe restaurant

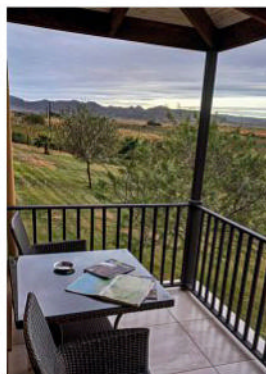
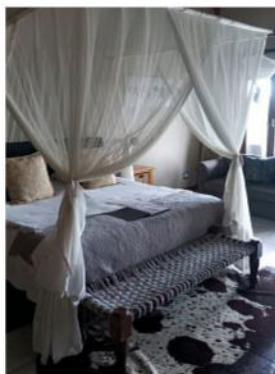
OUTDSHOORN

Did you know that Oudtshoorn was originally called Veldschoendorp? The name was changed in honour of Baron Pieter van Rheede van Oudtshoorn's daughter. The baron was governor of the Cape and his daughter died at sea on the journey to South Africa in 1772.

If you've driven here and haven't seen an ostrich yet, then you probably never take your eyes off the road... Ostrich feathers were exported to Europe from the early 1800s, but there was a boom from the 1850s onwards when the price of feathers reached record heights.

Oudtshoorn is the heart of the Little Karoo and your gateway to ostrich show farms and the Cango Caves (see #95 – 99 in our 101 Karoo Classics list on p 115 – 116). De Rust is also only 34 km away and that's where you gain access to Meiringspoort – see #100 on our list (p 117).

More info: oudtshoorn.com



De Zeekoe

The accommodation units are mostly at the farmstead, where the spacious Standard Rooms start at R860 per person sharing with breakfast. (Superior Rooms from R1 746 with breakfast.)

The three stylish stone cottages are a five-minute drive from the farmstead – rates from R2 021 per person sharing with breakfast (meals are served in the restaurant at the farmstead).

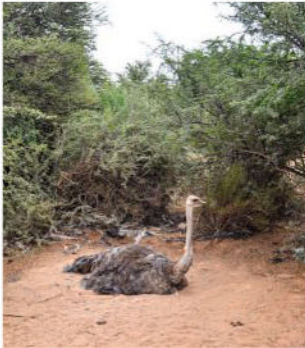
The owners also run the more luxurious Wildehondekloof Private Game Reserve, which is north-west of Oudtshoorn closer to the Swartberg. Two-night package from R5 460 per person sharing (three nights R7 400), including all meals and a game drive.

What else? The restaurant at De Zeekoe serves delicious dishes and day visitors are welcome (breakfast and dinner – bookings essential). Order springbok carpaccio salad (R80) as a starter, followed by ostrich bobotie (R130), or stuffed butternut (R110) if you've had enough meat for now.

Where? About 10 km south-west of Oudtshoorn – turn off the R328.

Contact: ☎ 082 551 3019; 🌐 dezeekoe.co.za; 🏠 whkloof.co.za

Devey Glinister gives a talk about meerkats.



DO THIS

At **Safari Ostrich Farm**, a one-hour tour teaches you everything there is to know about the history of ostrich farming in the Little Karoo, how these funny-looking birds are farmed, and the different products made from their meat, leather and feathers.

You're transported on a fancy tractor trailer (it feels like you're in a game-viewing vehicle) through some of the ostrich camps for a part of the tour. Later, you'll walk a short distance to feed the ostriches (they peck enthusiastically – make sure you have a firm grip on the container!) and to test whether an ostrich egg can hold your weight (it can). Along the way, you'll meet some of the senior stars, like Madonna (29) and Lady Gaga (21). Tours depart daily on the hour from 8 am to 4 pm; R180 per adult until end November; R194 per adult

thereafter. Children aged 6–15 years get a 50% discount; free for children under 6. You also get a 20% discount if you book online.

One of the best things you'll ever spend R660 on is a tour with **Five Shy Meerkats**. (Tip: Book via De Zeekoe; then it costs R561 per person.) Early one morning I meet guides Devey Glinister and Kobus Maritz in the veld next to the R62. We each grab a camping chair, walk a short distance, and sit down.

What happens next might be the cutest show ever put on in the Little Karoo! (With respect to the KKNK arts festival...) When the sun comes up, a curious meerkat will peek out of a nearby burrow. Then another one, and another one. Soon there will be a whole gang of them standing with their tummies turned to the sun. This is how a day in the

life of a meerkat starts. As you watch them, Devey and Kobus will tell you more about their behaviour.

When the meerkats leave the burrow to start foraging for food, the excursion is over and you walk back to your vehicle. Your day is made and you haven't even had breakfast! The daily tour takes about 2–3 hours and you have to book. (Take note: No children under 10 allowed because sitting still is essential...)

Where? Safari Ostrich Farm is almost right next to De Zeekoe; the meerkat tours also meet up nearby, next to the R62.

Contact: Safari Ostrich Farm ☎ 044 272 7311;

📍 safariostrich.co.za

Five Shy Meerkats ☎ 084 772 9678;

📍 fiveshymeerkats.co.za

Uniondale



UNIONDALE

Uniondale is on the eastern edge of the Little Karoo. The N9 skirts the town and it sees a lot of traffic, especially during December holidays when families from upcountry head to the coastal towns on the Garden Route. Uniondale is also well positioned to explore the Langkloof, Prince Alfred Pass and the Baviaanskloof.

Pull over in town for lunch at The Hungry Ghost (23 Voortrekker Street) for a pizza (from R75), burger and chips (from R90) or a milkshake (from R25). Contact ☎ 044 752 1045; open Monday to Thursday from 3 pm to 9 pm; Friday and Saturday from noon to 10 pm.

More info: 🌐 uniondale.co.za;
📞 myuniondale.co.za
📍 visitgeorge.co.za

Eagle Falls Country Lodge & Adventures

A surprising scene unfolds as you approach Eagle Falls – a waterfall! Water is indeed abundant in this part of the Little Karoo, which enables owner Michael le Roux and his business partner to farm with figs, pomegranates and almonds.

Michael grew up in the Kammanassie Valley (his three brothers also farm here) and he's watched as the region has moved through various agricultural phases, from fruit farming to ostriches and back to fruit.

"Lucky for us the Molen River always has water," he says. "Even during the recent seven-year drought. The river is fed by a spring in the mountain."

The accommodation options are all on the edge of the kloof. The first units were built in 1997 after a friend of Michael's came here to fish and suggested they build a holiday place.

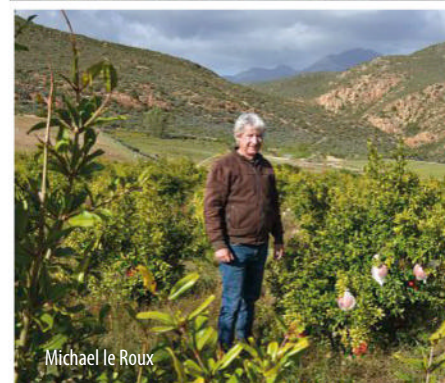
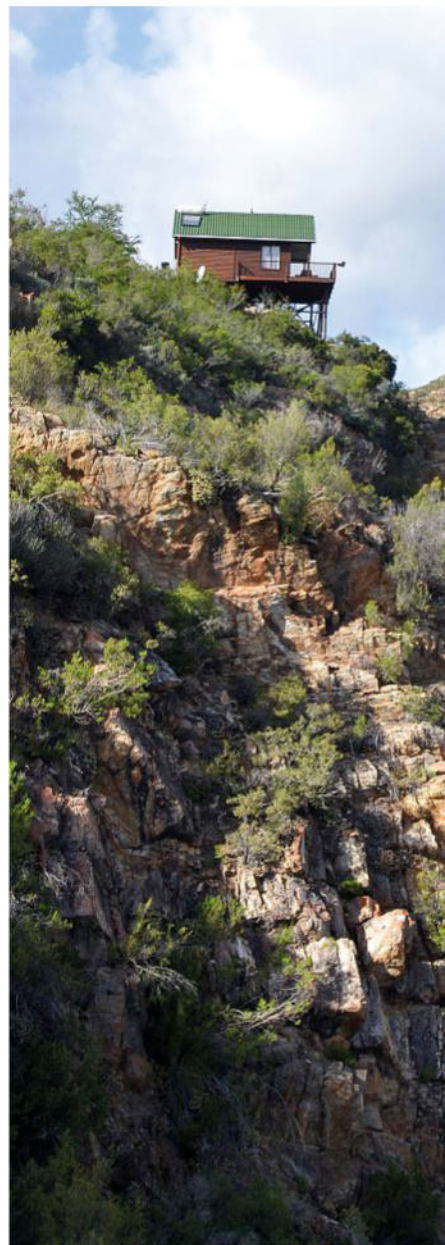
Two log cabins downstream from the main building offer the best views of the waterfall. One sleeps up to four people (R1 735 per night for four; R1 300 for two) and the other sleeps two (R950). There are also rooms in the main building, which shares a balcony and veranda with the adjacent restaurant. Accommodation here from R740 per night for two people.

The campsite is big, with a lawn. The view is upstream, into the kloof. It's a scenic spot where you'll want to spend your days reading and braaiing. The toilets are neat, but the shower area is quite open, in a backpackers' style. Rates from R399 per stand for two people; R499 for four.

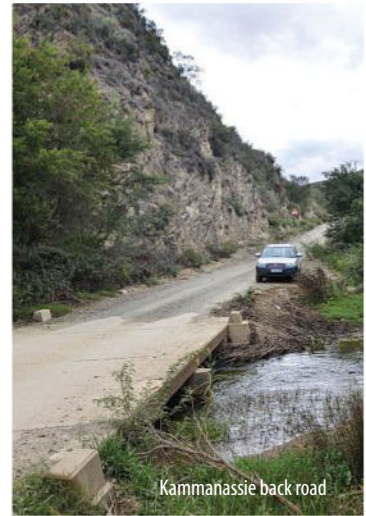
Meals are available – book beforehand.

Where? From Uniondale, follow the N9 south for 47 km until you see the sign for Eagle Falls to the right – then it's another 9 km on a dirt road.

Contact: ☎ 084 943 1614; 📧 Eaglefalls@hilbert.co.za; "Eagle Falls Country Lodge & Adventures" on Facebook



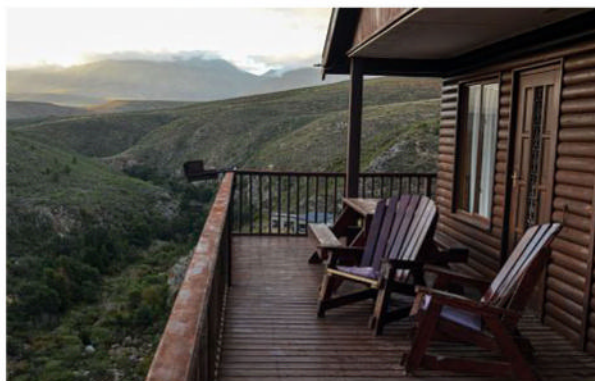
Michael le Roux



Kammanassie back road

DO THIS

Although you can easily access Eagle Falls from the R62 (N9), you can also get there via the lovely **Kammanassie back road**. From Uniondale, follow the N9 south for 7 km and turn right at the Kammanassie sign – Eagle Falls is 28 km further. After your stay, you can drive the rest of the route: It tracks along the southern side of the Kammanassie Mountains to Dysselsdorp (50 km), where you can go see the attractive Roman Catholic church on a nearby koppie.



CAPE COUNTRY ROUTES

Karoo Art Hotel, De Zeekoe and Safari Ostrich Farm are part of Cape Country Routes, an organisation that promotes tourism along some popular routes by focusing on member hotels and guesthouses. Toast Coetzer stayed over as a guest of Cape Country Routes – thank you! Read more about their other routes and accommodation options at [capecountryroutes.com](https://www.capecountryroutes.com)

Hofmeyr rising

The small town of Hofmeyr in the Eastern Cape is fighting the platteland poverty slump, thanks to the faith and finances of some hardy locals.

WORDS & PICTURES **CHRIS MARAIS**





Approaching from the south along the R390, your first sighting of Hofmeyr is of two distinctive breast-shaped hills jutting out from behind the town. From the north, the pink spire of the Dutch Reformed church greets the eye from far away.

In the past, driving into town would have meant encountering litter-strewn streets, the odd loiterer on a corner, and crumbling Victorian-era architecture. It's no wonder outsiders often referred to the town as "Stofmeyr". And it's true, for Hofmeyr was once on its knees.

Since 2020, however, Hofmeyr has been on the rise. Travellers now drive down its mostly clean streets, stop for good meals at The Farmhouse Coffee Shop & Farm Stall (simply called "the padstal") or book in for the night at a boutique hotel that would do Greyton proud. And there's a passionate, ongoing community initiative that would make even Gift of the Givers take notice.

But first, let's talk about that pink church, built at the height of the Depression in 1933. Local legend has it that when a decision was going to be made on the colour of the church, someone spotted a white bakkie parked in front. It was pink with dust brought in off the flats by the late winter winds. The thinking was this: If we paint the church pink, no one will recognise the dust if it blows onto the walls.

Founded in 1874, the town was first named Maraisburg, but since there was another Maraisburg near Johannesburg, it was renamed in 1911 in honour of Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr, a local political champion of both agriculture and the Afrikaans language. (He was affectionately called "Onze Jan".)

Little did they realise they were creating the town icon and the first pink church in the Karoo...

You buy the hotel, I'll get the padstal

No one wants to spend time and money in a town that takes no pride in itself. Travellers passing through take one look at the piles of rubbish and jam down on the accelerator. Hofmeyr was once such a town. Then Dominee Marius Barnard of said pink church decided to become a part-time street cleaner.

"I started picking up rubbish in the section of the main road in front of our house," he said. "The litter came back. Then I began cleaning up every day, in front of the *padstal* as well. Sometimes the schoolchildren would help me, in return for some bread, coffee and cooldrinks. We would sweep the pavements, take out the *bossies* and clean the fence lines."

Clean streets are a great start, but where can a modern-day wanderer find a decent cup of coffee, or a hearty meal? Enter the Lord family, whom my wife Julienne and I met ages ago at a *plaaskonsert* on their farm Alicedale about 25 km north-east of Hofmeyr. At that concert, their teenage son Thomas stunned the audience with a world-class piano performance. He sat calmly in front of a Grotrian-Steinweg grand piano and played like a maestro, raising money for an old age home. By then, he'd already won his South African

HOFMEYR

colours for music and gone to the World Championships in Performing Arts in Los Angeles. He came home with one gold medal and two silvers.

But that's not all, folks. When Thomas was 11 years old, he was walking around on their farm when he discovered the fossilised skull of a *Kannemeyeria*, a genus of the *Dicynodont*, which was a hip-high, mammal-like, pre-dinosaur creature that lived 235 million years ago. Hardly a dozen other specimens have ever been found.

During our most recent visit to Hofmeyr in the autumn of 2023, Julianne and I shared a meal with Thomas's parents, David and Lynette Lord.

"Back in 2018, the town was in a terrible state," David said as we sat down at The Farmhouse. "Then it was announced that the *padstal* and the hotel would be auctioned late in November 2019. There were rumours that foreign buyers wanted to turn the *padstal* into a liquor store, and that the hotel would be downgraded into cheap accommodation."

David Lord and fellow farmer Kippie Louw came to an arrangement: David would bid for the *padstal* and Kippie would bid for the hotel.

"We were not going to let Hofmeyr crash and burn," David said. "I did some research into what customers needed from a *padstal* and found out it was all about clean bathrooms, decent coffee and a pet-friendly attitude. Add some good food, plus flowers and soft music to create the right atmosphere."

After the auction, a friend phoned Lynette Lord to congratulate her on becoming a *padstal* owner. It all came as news to her!

"I didn't speak to David for a week," she said with a laugh. "But then I decided I'd better get involved, to make this work."

The Farmhouse has become a roaring success. It offers good meals, pies, quiches, jams from Cradock, biscuits from Hofmeyr, rusks from Steynsburg and all sorts of locally made cushion covers, pillows and knitted baby clothes.

We checked into the nearby Victoria Boutique Hotel for the night and were met by manager-chef Jackie Human (aka Jax) and George Kiewiets, her right-hand man.

From the chequerboard entrance and the gleaming bar, to the elegant interiors of the three lounges and our superb room, the Victoria is five-star country style personified. The transformation from its old self is stunning.

This is Jax' first Karoo hotel assignment. She worked in London once upon a time (in the litigation department of Lloyd's, *nogal*), then plunged into the restaurant business in Plett, and later in Jeffreys Bay.

Kippie Louw, like David Lord, said nothing to his wife about their new acquisition – the old hotel in town.

"I was in total shock at first," Mariana Louw told me later. "But Kippie had seen the potential of the place, the fact that it lies on the route between Gauteng and the Eastern Cape and would be the perfect overnight spot for travellers, just like in the old days.

"We both come from the Karoo and the deterioration of the platteland affects us. We wanted to make a positive difference for the town and its community."

Jax Human was appointed and the game was on.

"They gave me carte blanche to design a menu and run the place," she said. "I realised quickly that people want good but simple food. The pizzas are popular; fish and chips, too. But visitors are also learning the

flavours of things they might never have eaten before, like tiramisu, panna cotta and crème brûlée.

Mariana took on the massive decor re-design, but first there were some basic tasks to be done.

"The hotel was built in 1880 – everything was outdated," Mariana explained. "We had to redo the electricity and the plumbing, replace the windows and doors and add on to the main building. Kippie bought the property behind the hotel as well – it has a borehole and the hotel runs off a generator during loadshedding.

"I bought some of the furniture at various auctions; other pieces came from antique shops and even our own home. I spent the next year cleaning and upholstering the old furniture."

The hotel officially opened in January 2021 and has been enthusiastically supported by reps, road-trippers and locals alike.

Hugs of Hope

A street-cleaning dominee, a great *padstal* and a classy hotel are all very welcome, but they alone can't address the needs of the many thousands of Hofmeyr people mired deep in a poverty cycle. That's where Hugs of Hope comes in.

Behind the pink church stands a small building with a few bakkies parked outside. This is the church hall, and also the Hugs of Hope HQ.

Running the show is Teresa Opperman, her eyes glittering with energy.

She wasn't always a fireball like this. Teresa suffered from crippling diabetes, but a new way of administering insulin changed her energy levels, her outlook and her mission in life. She decided to devote herself to making the world a better place – starting with Hofmeyr, her home town.

Opposite page, clockwise from top left: The Farmhouse Coffee Shop & Farm Stall co-owner David Lord with Noet Posiwe, who looks after the patrons' vehicles; Angora goats on a nearby farm; Teresa Opperman, founder of Hugs of Hope; Hettie Hänker runs the kitchen at the Hugs of Hope hall; Twinsville Primary is desperately in need of just about everything, including playground facilities; Victoria Boutique Hotel owners Kippie and Mariana Louw; the Victoria Boutique Hotel has classy interiors; a young Thomas Lord entertaining the audience at a *plaaskonsert* back in 2015; gilt-edged mirrors at the Victoria Boutique Hotel add a sense of space.





IN OTHER WORDS

Jo Els, retired country magistrate

"Apart from the pink church, I remember the broekielace awnings of the double-storeyed Magistrates Court, where I spent many righteous hours trying to dispense justice as the once-a-week visiting magistrate.

"Hofmeyr was fine, but it really elevated its standing when the padstal and the dilapidated hotel were so beautifully restored. Both are within short walking distance from the courts, and I sought relief there from the despair that sometimes consumes a country magistrate.

"I love the yellow fattiness of the Karoo biltong at The Farmhouse, and at the Victoria Boutique Hotel, chef Jax Human's flagship Windsor lamb stew..."



HOFMEYR'S MISSING LINK

Hofmeyr made world headlines in 1952 when a 36 000-year-old human skull was discovered in an erosion gully near the town.

The so-called Hofmeyr Skull provided a vital "missing link" in the fossil record, which contributed to the theory that modern people originally came from sub-Saharan Africa and then migrated to Europe and Asia.

We accompanied Teresa through the doors into a bewildering scene. It was the monthly "sale day" at the Hugs hall, and the tables were tidily stacked with clothes going for R5 an item, no matter what. Excited customers were digging deep into the heaps of clobber.

"I have friends and family from all over South Africa who donate the clothes," said Teresa. "What isn't sold here today goes to charities in Molteno, Sterkstroom and the Vukusebenza shelter in Cradock. We also have seamstresses working for us. They clean, repair and iron the clothes. We often see people who have lost their jobs, especially up on the mines. You find them staying here, on the streets, in their cars with nothing. We donate clothes to them as well."

Hugs of Hope, established in 2016, supports local schools, the library, and the old age home. All donations are carefully distributed to those most in need.

One of the main activities here is sewing. With this skill, women can work from home, making essential items for their families at a fraction of the cost, and sell things like quilts, aprons, shopping bags, beanies, teddy bears and place mats.

The seamstresses were happily chatting and hard at work across the road at Huis Alida, named after Ouma Alida van der Merwe, who lived there nearly a century ago. The rooms were crammed with overlockers, sewing machines and a huge quilting machine.

Hugs of Hope runs regular training courses, teaching quilting, sewing, baking, carpentry, beading, home-based care, basic computer skills and financial management for SASSA pensioners.

Outside the church hall, we met Christa Pienaar at her bakkie, about to offload a bunch of Rhode Island

Red-type *skrophoenders* (free-range chickens) to sell, with the proceeds going to Hugs of Hope.

"I had a good year with the chickens," she said. "This is my way of contributing."

Teresa took us to Twinsville Primary School, where she has plans to build jungle gyms and swings in the otherwise empty schoolyard. The school is poor, but the classrooms were full of attentive learners and dedicated teachers. Hugs of Hope bought shoes for the children, plus crayons, exam pads and carpets for some of the classrooms. They also planted trees for shade in the schoolyard – the shade is the first place the children head to at break time.

Teresa had more projects to show us and people to introduce us to. Like Wilson Gela, another Hugs beneficiary, who works with skins like kudu and springbok that Teresa helps source from hunters. He teaches youngsters the art of skin preparation before tanning, which mysteriously involves dishwashing liquid and salt, many flies, and leaving stiff skins out in the yard.

Then on to Gcobani Makhasi, to whom Hugs of Hope gave seedlings. Now Gcobani teaches other people how to garden. In another sprawling backyard, we saw Barend Opperman's vegetable patch full of brussels sprouts, kale, eggplant, green pepper, beans, chillies, mielies, tomatoes and onions. Hugs of Hope provide the seeds and then buy Barend's produce from him, which is used for the feeding scheme.

In the township of Twinsville we met Betty Miggels in a garden full of dahlias, cosmos and marigolds, zinnias and daisies.

"I planted some *Afrikanertjies* (marigolds) for my dad, and they spread. Then Teresa came and said she would pay me for flowers to put on tables for weddings," Betty told us.

Although Dominee Barnard has since been transferred out of Hofmeyr, his legacy lives on. The streets of Hofmeyr were, at last sighting in early winter 2023, virtually spotless. Lottoland came through with sponsorship so that Hugs of Hope could set up the jungle gyms at Twinsville Primary.

Possibly the most significant change that Hugs of Hope has brought to Hofmeyr has been lighting the creative fire in parts of the local community. We saw this in action when we met Lydia Mkhuzangwe, who was steadily transforming her garden with roses, grasses and other garden plants, some of them planted in old toilet bowls that the municipality had discarded at the dump.

“The toilet bowls make very good flowerpots,” she said with a smile.

Chris Marais and Julienne du Toit are the authors of several books on the Karoo – see karoospace.co.za and follow them on Instagram @karoospace.



Above, clockwise from top left: Bettie Miggels, in a sea of flowers for sale. Wilson Gela who, with the support of Hugs of Hope, prepares game skins for tanning during the hunting season; Jacob Pergoo and Basie Kramer, gardeners at Barend Opperman's nursery; Christa Pienaar brings chickens to sell in aid of Hugs of Hope.



The Farmhouse Coffee Shop & Farm Stall

HOFMEYR



BACK IN THE DAY

Iris Vaughan, one of the Karoo's premier writers, came to live in Hofmeyr from nearby Cradock before the Anglo-Boer War, when the town was still called Maraisburg. This extract is from her famous childhood diary, published in 1958:

"Late when the sun was down, we came in two postcards to Maraisburg. It is a small place with two funny hills. We stopped at the hotel. There are no lamps in the street like in Cradock, so everywhere is dark. There is one glass lamp outside the Hotel with 'Hotel' written on it. It is not a nice hotel. The floors are of mud. Every week the floors are smeared with mis which is cow dung made soft like mud with water. It has a nasty smell.

"There is a room where men are sitting and laughing loudly and spitting into white basins on the floor. In the dining room are three tables and a big clock. At one table a man was eating and doing much belching and never excuse me please."



HORSE THERAPY

At the Joy for Grace stables in town, we met quadriplegic JF Burger during a session of hippotherapy, which uses the natural motion and gait of a horse to promote motor and sensory input. JF has a full-time carer at home, but this care is supplemented by hippotherapy under guidance of local horse trainer Zettie Jordaan.

In the five years that JF has practised this, his health and mobility have improved dramatically. He owns two mounts, Stompie and Trompie, both retired saddle horses trained by Zettie. She grew up with Boerperde and saddle horses on a nearby farm called Palmietfontein.

Once JF was lifted into the saddle and he was sitting astride Trompie, the transition from a slumped form in a wheelchair to jubilant horseman was remarkable. He grinned widely, flung out his arms and sang "I Believe I Can Fly", followed by a passable rendition of "Ou, Ryperd".

Zettie takes JF through his paces three times per week for a 45-minute session each time. She makes him trot in figures of eight, asking him to lift up his arms as he goes, and sometimes she throws a ball for him to catch. These sessions have literally changed his life.



Clockwise, from left: Teebus and Koffiebus (Teapot and Coffee Pot) are two well-known landmarks between Hofmeyr and Steynsburg. Jackie Human and George Kiewiets of the Victoria Boutique Hotel; the gang behind the grub at The Farmhouse *padstal*: from left, Desire Schofield, Lynette Lord, Michelle Johnson and Noelen Koker.



EAT HERE

The Farmhouse Coffee Shop & Farm Stall

Also known as “the padstal”, this eatery is in the centre of town, on the corner of the main road (R401) and Van Heerden Street. Enjoy meals like roosterkoek with pulled lamb (R50), roosterkoek with eggs benedict and biltong (R70) or oxtail pie (R70).

Opening times: Monday to Friday 8am – 4pm; Saturday and Sunday 8am – noon.

Contact: 087 807 8522; “Hofmeyr The Farmhouse” on Facebook



STAY HERE

Victoria Boutique Hotel

This hotel is in Molteno Street,

near The Farmhouse. There are two big en suite rooms (each with a bath and shower) for R1 600 per night for two people; and six smaller en suite (shower only) rooms for R1 500 per night for two people.

They offer pub lunch meals like burgers and fish and chips; some dinner favourites include Karoo lamb chops and 21-day matured steak. Meals vary from about R100 to R170.

Contact: 072 553 7523; vicbhotel@algoanet.com; “Victoria Boutique Hotel – Hofmeyr” on Facebook

CONTRIBUTE

Hugs of Hope

If you'd like to donate money,

clothes or other items to Hugs of Hope, contact Teresa Opperman:

076 122 8719;

teresaopperman9@gmail.com



SHOP HERE

Sutherlandia Shop

Sutherlandia frutescens, or cancer bush, is a medicinal plant that grows in the Eastern Cape Karoo and elsewhere in South Africa. It is claimed to boost your immune system, for example when battling cancer.

Ronel Visser has been managing her Sutherlandia business from a lovely old house at 29 Du Plessis Street in Hofmeyr since 2003, selling cancer bush tea and capsules (R200 for 90,

which is a month's supply) to clients all over the country.

“The strongest and most active plants grow in the veld between Cradock and Hofmeyr,” she told us. “But they are hard to harvest out there. The first seeds I planted did not survive, but I eventually found the knack for it and started planting in the backyard. It's an erratic crop, simply picked (leaves only) and dried at the right time, then crushed in a hammer mill to fit into capsules or used as a tea.”

The Sutherlandia Shop is open daily, but you must phone ahead.

Contact: 082 788 1755 (Ronel Visser); kankerbos@gmail.com

Guardian of the ‘nothingness’

Sue Milton-Dean from Prince Albert runs Renu-Karoo, an indigenous plant nursery in town, and also leads walking tours in the veld to educate locals and visitors about the fragile beauty of the Karoo.

WORDS & PICTURES **SAM REINDERS**

Early one February morning, I follow a small convoy of cars on a gravel road just outside Prince Albert. We drive past the golf course and the town's landfill and eventually come to a stop at a seemingly empty piece of land.

Here, we're met by a petite grey-haired woman. She opens the gate to Wolwekraal Nature Reserve and we drive in and park. The sun has just risen and the morning smells of toothpaste and Karoo *bossies* as we all gather around and wait for an introduction from Sue Milton-Dean.

Sue is a plant ecologist. That's her formal title, but I like to think of her as a female Gandalf. She's wise, humble and giving, and has an encyclopaedic knowledge of all things to do with plants.

We're about to embark on a two-hour guided walk. I live in Prince Albert and I've been on this walk a few times before, but my fellow excursionists – all city slickers – are

newbies. They were nudged to be here by me and I get a whiff of their scepticism. "There's nothing here," I can almost hear them thinking. "It's barren land, dead from the drought! This is going to be *booo-ring...*"

It's a subtle vibe and they're trying their best not to show it, but it's there. I'm not too worried, though: This isn't my first Sue Milton-Dean rodeo. I know how things will pan out.

When my family first relocated from Cape Town to Prince Albert almost two decades ago, I was sceptical of the move. Dismissive, even. A veld walk with Sue back then made me realise that this semi-desert is a living, breathing place. But Sue also offers much more than that. While she's talking about plants or insects or weather patterns, she has the uncanny ability to tap into bigger themes about life on a larger scale, too. Afterwards, you see yourself and your place in the world just a little bit more clearly. I've been an evangelical follower of hers ever since.

Together with her partner in life, love and science, the renowned ornithologist Richard Dean, Sue moved to Prince Albert in 1986. Hired by the FitzPatrick Institute at the University of Cape Town, they set about establishing and managing the Karoo Biome Project and the Tierberg Karoo Research Centre near town. Over the span of almost four decades, their work has resulted in 140 academic publications and transformed the centre into a hub of research in the region.

Sue taught at Stellenbosch University and commuted back and forth for years, but eventually she and Richard shifted away from their academic careers and began focusing their considerable energy on Prince Albert, where they set up a community-based veld restoration and revitalisation programme. Tragically, Richard passed away in 2022, but Sue – the indefatigable warrior for all things plant – has continued their shared mission.

In town, she heads up Renu-Karoo, the nursery on the main road.





JOIN A TOUR

Sue prefers to take groups of six people at a time (R250 p.p.), but smaller groups can make a special arrangement. Bigger groups and kids under 12 pay less. It's essential to book well in advance: ☎ 082 770 0206 (Sue).

The **Renu-Karoo Nursery** is on the corner of Church and Van Dyk streets in Prince Albert. Some of their most popular sales are Lang-Jan (*Athanasia tomentosa*), ash bush (*Pteronia incana*) and anchor karoo bush (*Pentzia incana*). Prices start at R49 a plant.

Opening times: Weekdays

7.30 am – 5 pm; Saturdays 8 am – 1 pm.

Contact: ☎ 082 650 9792 (Bertus

Fourie); ✉ renukaroo@gmail.com;

📍 renu-karoo.co.za; 📍 wcro.co.za

(about Wolwekraal)

Renu-Karoo produces indigenous Karoo plants and “plugs” (trays of young, rooted plants grown from seed or cuttings) for landscaping and restoration. The availability of indigenous plants in the village has gradually led to water-wise gardening becoming increasingly popular, and to an awareness of local plant diversity.

In 2005, the Deans bought Wolwekraal Nature Reserve – a 113-hectare portion of a much larger sheep farm of the same name – and lovingly restored the veld to what it should be without human interference. Wolwekraal serves as a research ground for students, interns, locals and tourists (anyone who will listen!) of the fragility of the Karoo landscape and how we can best look after it.

My initially dubious group of friends walk carefully, following instructions from Sue to damage as little of the veld as possible. Barely five metres in, I can already sense a shift in mood as Sue comes alive with stories of the epic battle it takes for anything to survive here.

“Droughts are the rule and good seasons the exception,” she says, leaning down to point out a species of plant that almost all of us would have stepped over, if not *on*. A beautiful lithop, half-buried in the soil, adapting to its surroundings, peeks out from the shadow of a small rock.

“We’re surrounded by an eco-region called Succulent Karoo,” Sue says. “This area is a global biodiversity hotspot – it has more kinds of plants and animals for its size than any other arid area in the world.”

Of the roughly 5 000 plant species in the Succulent Karoo, almost half are endemic. Many are adapted to store their own water supply in leaves or stems for use in the dry months. They include vygies, aloes, *plakkies* (*Crassulaceae*), geraniums, and *melkbos* (*Euphorbiaceae*).

“One third of the world’s 10 000 succulent plant species are found in this region,” Sue says, casually putting out a statistic that makes us stop in our tracks. You can almost hear people’s eyes open wider. My friends are leaning in closer to listen to what she has to say, stepping more lightly, focusing their gaze on the ground, looking for plants and insects that blend in with their environment.

Sue leads us to a San midden where shards of pottery and bits of ostrich eggshell lie scattered around. She vividly paints a picture of what the landscape would have looked like when the San lived here – maybe as recently as 300 years ago, but also for centuries before that. “It would have been greener long ago, for sure,” she says, explaining that a local river probably flowed continuously, making it a more attractive place to settle. The development of the modern town of Prince Albert has changed the flow of the now largely ephemeral rivers in the area over time.

As the sun gets higher (pro tip: wear long sleeves and sunblock) the talk turns to environmental issues such as the proposed explorative “fracking” operations to release large reserves of shale gas that are trapped in layers of rock far below the surface of the Karoo. If our mere footprints can cause damage, just imagine what drilling and fracking would do here?

While human presence in general – the influence of grazing animals, farm fences, widespread hunting, burgeoning towns – has already transformed the landscape from what it looked like 200 years ago, mining would cause irreparable damage.

This is turning into a gloomy end to the walk, but that’s not Sue’s way.

“This veld has seen drought after drought and more hard times than you can count,” she says. “And there will be more such times...”

On a personal level, Sue sees it

as her legacy to promote the path to restore ecosystem integrity and protect the Karoo from future degradation. She wants to pass on her knowledge and passion for conservation to future generations by way of mentorship.

“I love it when I get children on my walks,” she says. “The more the better! I know somewhere in there is a future plant ecologist. We must catch them young and get them excited about plants and insects, and show them that there’s a career to be made in places like this.”

Through her dedication and expertise, Sue has shown that the preservation of this unique environment requires not only knowledge but also action. Her efforts have inspired many to appreciate the small wonders of the Karoo, and to recognise their role in safeguarding its future.

As Prince Albert has grown over the years, Sue has been called in to advise owners who have bought land on the outskirts of town. For example, in an area called Waterkop, she’s helped new residents position their houses to avoid the most sensitive veld on the plots.

“Building is hugely destructive because it’s not just the plants that die,” she says. “Each plant supports several insects, which are food for other things. It’s all a cycle.”

Afterwards, my friends head back to Prince Albert as new advocates for Karoo biodiversity. What might have seemed like pure emptiness a few hours ago is now a natural treasure chest. Their scepticism has waned and they feel more connected to the environment. This is what Prince Alberters call the “Sue Milton-Dean effect”.

Sue just smiles. “I just have to keep giving it my all,” she says. “All the passion, all the drive. My dream is to leave things here in good working order so it’s all worth taking over one day.”



Macledium rehhanioides



Lammerlat (*Gomphocarpus filiformis*)



Volstruiskanna (*Augea capensis*)



Sleep softly in the Hardemans Karoo

You could have a long debate about how and where the internal borders of the Karoo should be drawn, but it's undeniable that the Hardemans Karoo offers space and silence in abundance. Here are some special places to stay in this region.

WORDS & PICTURES **WILLEM VAN DER BERG**



Sunset in the Hardemans Karoo is an experience like no other. Make sure you find a good rock to sit on and watch. The "sunset koppie" at Biesieslaagte is just the place for it.



Regional borders are hard to define, especially in the Karoo. They aren't clearly marked, if they're marked at all, and the vague lines disappear among *kriedorings* or behind a koppie. The Hardemans Karoo is one such region that leaves people scratching their heads. Most people say it's the area around Carnarvon, Williston, Fraserburg and Loxton. Some say Vanwyksvlei should be included; others say it doesn't exist at all. No one really knows where the name comes from, but I can venture a guess: It's a hard landscape for man and beast.

If you've never been, now is the time. This is the Karoo in its purest form. You can walk or drive around all day without seeing another soul. The sunrise smells like *bossies* and at night the stars hang low above the earth.

This part of the Karoo is known for its corbelled houses – stone “igloos” built by trek farmers in centuries gone by. If you want to see how people used to live in this region, stay in a corbelled house for a night – turn to page 83 – 84 for information about Stuurmansfontein and Osfontein, both near Carnarvon.

The Hardemans Karoo offers lovely places to sleep to suit all tastes. You don't have to collect water from a well or sleep on the ground like people used to in the past. New guest farms and campsites have opened in recent years that offer experiences you won't find anywhere else. Here are my seven favourites.



CARNARVON

BIESIESLAAGTE

In the midst of the recent drought, the Louw family (Juan, his wife Janika, and Juan's parents, Andries and Freda) started to renovate the old farmhouse on Biesieslaagte for guest accommodation. It was done slowly, wall by wall, because all available funds went to buying feed for their sheep. And they wondered whether people would actually *want* to stay in an old farmhouse in the quiet, dry Karoo. But since the front door opened at the beginning of 2022, it has been a hit. Through the windows, you can watch the sun dip low among the *silwerkaroo* and *skaapbos* and see the head of a windmill turning in the breeze.

There's a big fireplace in the kitchen and a long table perfect for feasting and chatting late into the night. There's a dam to swim in and a sheltered braai outside. For those who want to hike and ride their bicycle, there are marked routes ranging from 5 km to 30 km. There's also a koppie about 4 km from the house with great views at sunset. Listen closely: You might hear the bark of a bat-eared fox on the plains below.

Facilities: The house has everything you need for a self-catering break, with three bedrooms and one bathroom. (It sleeps eight in total.) Leave your hairdryer at home because the solar power is only for the lights. There's also a solar-powered fridge, gas geysers and a gas stove. In the kitchen you'll find fresh bread, home-made jam and a basket of farm eggs. There's no cellphone reception or Wi-Fi so you can switch off completely.

Where? Biesieslaagte is 20 km west of Carnarvon next to the R63, in the direction of Williston. It's close enough to the tar road to be accessible for any kind of vehicle, but far enough that traffic on the road won't disturb your peace.

Cost: R900 per night for two people; R1 200 per night for three people or more (maximum eight).

Contact: 📞 084 764 1081; ✉️ biesieslaagtekaroo@gmail.com; "Biesieslaagte" on Instagram and Facebook

WILLISTON**ROOIBERG GUEST FARM**

The Sak River, which rises in the Nuweveld Mountains near Beaufort West and peters out into the pans near Kenhardt, flows past Rooiberg. This 460 km-long river is usually dry, but when it does have water, crops like lucerne and wheat are cultivated on its banks.

The greater farm is called Vleiwerf – Rooiberg is named after the reddish mountain that floats on the surrounding grassland like a ship. You can climb up its slopes and walk in the Bushman grass after rain.

The Rooiberg guesthouse is incredibly neat and about a kilometre from the Vleiwerf farmstead. Owner Carien van Schalkwyk says she has a light case of perfectionism and I have to say, I haven't seen such a clean fridge in quite some time!

There's a braai on the stoep and a dam a few metres further where you can cool down.

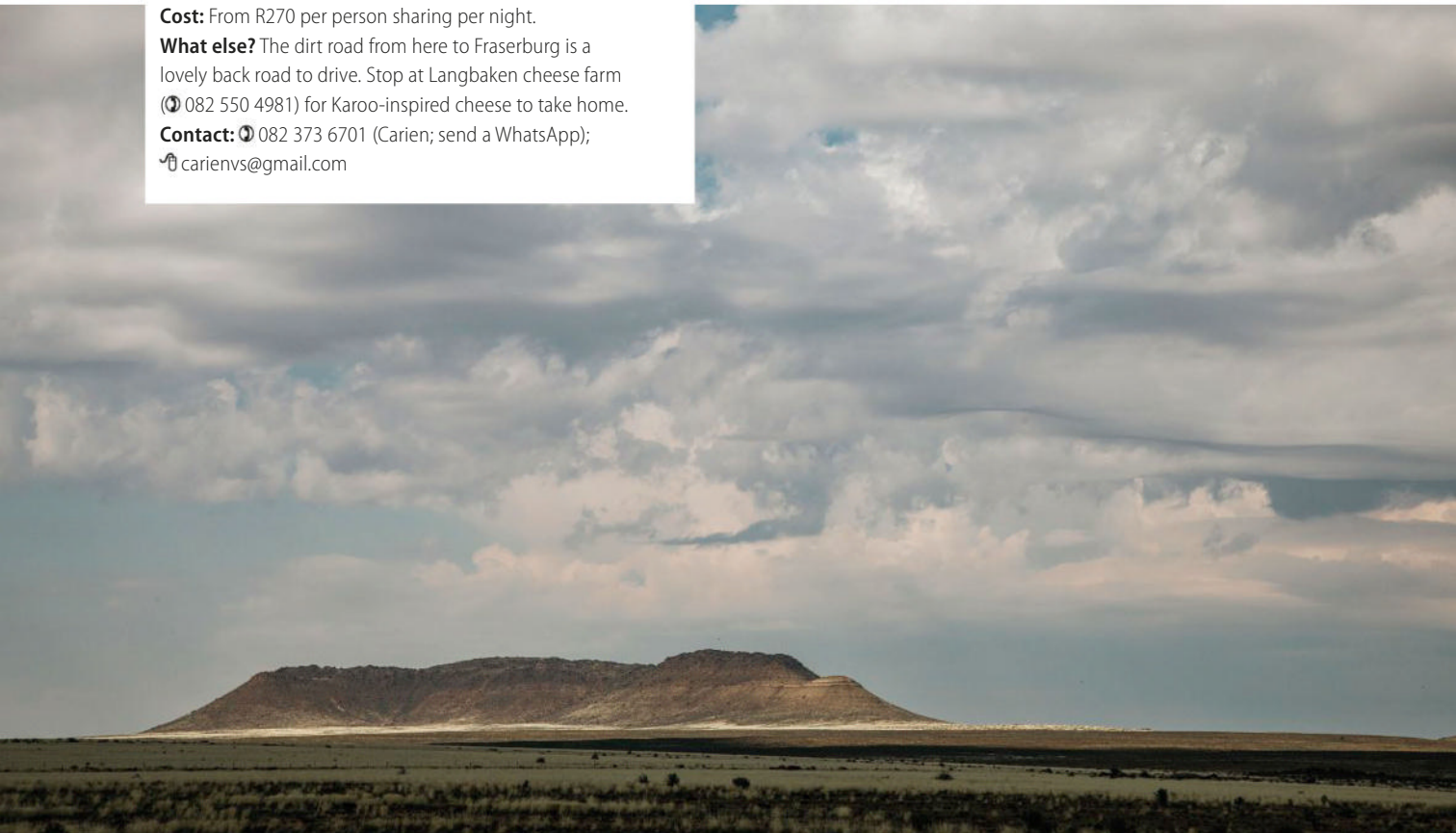
Facilities: The guesthouse sleeps six people in three bedrooms. Everyone shares one bathroom. The house is equipped for a self-catered stay and has Eskom power but no cellphone reception or Wi-Fi.

Where? From Williston: Drive 5 km east along the R63 tar road towards Carnarvon and turn right onto the Langbaken dirt road. The Vleiwerf farmstead, which serves as the reception office, is 15 km further, next to the road.

Cost: From R270 per person sharing per night.

What else? The dirt road from here to Fraserburg is a lovely back road to drive. Stop at Langbaken cheese farm (☎ 082 550 4981) for Karoo-inspired cheese to take home.

Contact: ☎ 082 373 6701 (Carien; send a WhatsApp);
✉ carienvs@gmail.com





FRASERBURG/LOXTON

KLEIN RIVIERTJIE



On the Le Riche family's farm, and the farms surrounding it, the slopes of the Nuweveld Mountains bring streams of rainwater together to form the Sak River. (The same river that passes Rooiberg Guest Farm downstream – see the previous page.)

Some of the water is collected in a big dam, where Nicholas le Riche spent many happy childhood hours splashing around. That's probably why he was picked to be on the Paarl Boys' High swimming team – an unusual achievement for someone from the Karoo!

His wife Quarta also grew up in the Karoo – on a farm near Loxton – and they both love doing things themselves and in their own way.

Klein Riviertjie, an old labourer's cottage that has been transformed into a stylish guesthouse, is a good example of this. It has heaps of character: The roof beams are from the farm's poplar grove; you have to stoke a donkey boiler for hot water; and you look at the beautiful landscape through old wooden window frames.

You can warm your feet next to the fireplace in the sitting room or relax in the hanging chair on the stoep. In summer, cool down in the splash pool with a drink in hand.

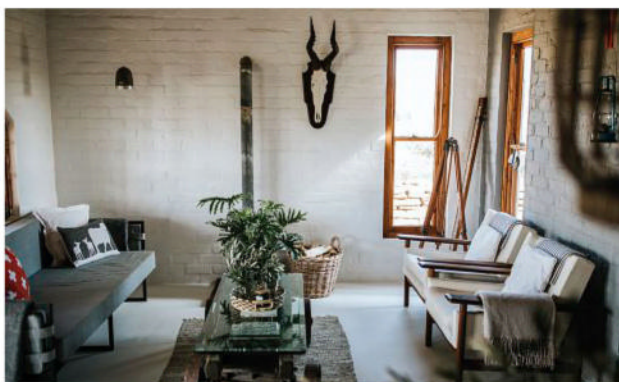
Facilities: The house has two bedrooms, one with a double bed and one with two single beds. The bathroom is shared and there's an outdoor shower. There's solar power for lights at night, plus a gas stove, fridge and a well-equipped kitchen. The bedding and towels also merit a mention – they lend a luxury feel to the place. Yes, good guess – there's no cellphone reception or Wi-Fi.

Where? About 70 km south-west of Loxton; 85 km north-west of Beaufort West. When you drive from Beaufort West to Loxton on the R381, there are two dirt roads branching off to Fraserburg – both will take you towards Klein Riviertjie. The R356 from Loxton will, too.

Cost: R2 300 per night for the house.

What else? The neighbouring farm is owned by Nicholas's parents. Their cottage, called Blaauwhoek, sleeps four people and costs the same as Klein Riviertjie.

Contact: 📞 083 629 2338 (send a WhatsApp);
info@higherkaroo.com; 🌐 higherkaroo.com;
“Higher Karoo” on Instagram or Facebook





FRASERBURG/SUTHERLAND

AARFONTEIN

Aarfontein is midway between Sutherland and Fraserburg, accessed via the spectacular Rante road – the back route between those towns. Turn at the red drum and take the farm road up Wildealskloof to where Annalene and Christoffel van Schalkwyk will be waiting for you at the farmstead. From there, they'll take you to the glass house – it has more windows than walls!

Annalene and Christoffel manage the farm and guesthouse for owner Lucas van Tonder, an advocate and the owner of Montpellier Wine Estate near Tulbagh.

The plateau at the top of the Nuweveld Mountains feels like a different place. The air is as fresh as spring water. The clouds touch your hair. Where the earth drops away into the blue, the glass house shines like the evening star. It's right on the escarpment. Below your feet, Eselfontein-se-kloof dives down into the brown plains of the Moordenaars Karoo.

Everything that happens outside the glass house happens inside as well. There's a window wherever you look. You're also painted orange when the sun sets, and the morning mist spreads over you like a blanket.

Facilities: The house is cosy, but also the perfect size. It sleeps four people on two sleeper couches that can be folded open to make double beds. The beds are close together so make sure you're with people you like!

The kitchen is equipped for self-catering, with a small fridge and a gas stove. There's a gas geyser, braai and fireplace, and solar-powered lights. A bottle of Montpellier wine and fresh bread will await you on the table. Cellphone reception is sporadic.

Where? Halfway between Sutherland (74 km) and Fraserburg (70 km). It's dirt road all the way and you need a vehicle with a high ground clearance for the last 10 km.

Cost: R1 500 per night for two people.

What else? There are three other self-catering stone cottages near the farmstead if the road up the mountain seems too challenging. Agat, Kraal and Vêr each sleep two. Rates from R450 per person.

Contact: 076 474 3623 (send a WhatsApp);

aarfontein@gmail.com; "Aarfontein Karoo Hoogland" on Facebook and Instagram





CARNARVON

KALKFONTEIN KLIPHUIS

This house is more than a century old and as beautiful as an artwork. It's located on a vast plain. There's a natural spring about 100 m from the front stoep – it was once the only source of water for the people who lived on the farm. Water still filters through the rocky earth and attracts all kinds of endemic birds, like mountain wheatear, Karoo prinia and Karoo chat.

You won't have to collect water from the spring because Lukie and Anine Steenkamp sunk a borehole. Kalkfontein Kliphuis stood empty for many years and Lukie and Anine had to do some renovations, but the house has retained a wonderful atmosphere. It feels like you're in a Karoo from another era, where people are scarce and herds of springbok are on the move.

At night you can light the lanterns and watch shooting stars through the window. In the morning, you can watch the sunrise from your bed.

Facilities: The Kliphuis has three spacious bedrooms (they share one bathroom) that sleep eight in total. The living area has a big fireplace where you can braai and hang out. There's no power (or cellphone reception or Wi-Fi), but there's a gas stove and a gas geyser. The kitchen is well equipped for self-catering. The owners plan to install a radio so guests can contact them.

Where? Kalkfontein Kliphuis is 20 km south of Carnarvon, next to the R63 towards Loxton. From the tar road, you follow a farm road for about 3 km. If the road is dry it's traversable in any vehicle.

Cost: R750 per person sharing.

Contact: 📞 082 838 8796 (send a WhatsApp);

✉ anine.annandale@gmail.com;

@kalkfontein_kliphuis on Instagram



LOXTON

SOUTPOORT

Look at the photo and it seems as if the only signs of human life are far over the rocky horizon. Yes, it definitely feels remote when you're camping at Soutpoort, but the R63 tar road between Loxton and Carnarvon is actually only 3 km from your tent.

Indeed, Soutpoort offers a proper Karoo experience without having to brave a corrugated jeep track for hours on end. Swim in the small dam and explore some of the jeep tracks on your mountain bike or on foot. You'll struggle to bid Soutpoort goodbye.

Facilities: Two camping stands close together but out of sight – you won't see other guests. Each stand has enough space for two tents on a cement floor under an awning. The awning offers shade and the bathroom has a shower (hot water), basin and toilet. The kitchen sink is outside. Both stands have a small swimming dam and one stand has power.

You'll be able to call your neighbour back home to check on Cindy the chihuahua – there's cellphone reception here.

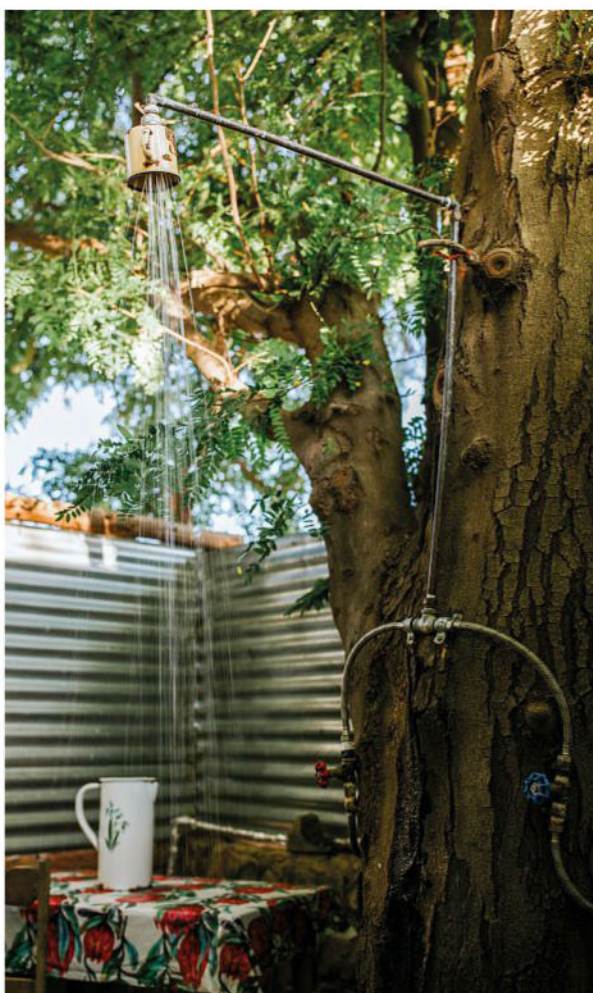
Where? About 15 km north of Loxton, next to the R63.

Cost: R400 per stand for four people; R90 per extra person; R200 per extra caravan or off-road trailer.

Contact: ☎ 072 623 7926 (Melissa; send a WhatsApp);

✉ thirionm@gmail.com; "Soutpoort" on Instagram and Facebook





CARNARVON/VOSBURG JOOSTESWERWE

Few things are as calming as a Karoo farm road. By the time you reach the Joosteswerwe campsite, you'll be in a good mood: The 15 km drive through the veld (and the farm gates you have to open – and close, please) will allow your thoughts to wander, your eyes to pick out steenbok, your ears to hear the call of the korhaan and your soul to breathe again.

Shade is scarce in the Karoo, which makes the camping stands at Joosteswerwe feel luxurious. They're shaded by big, dense thorn trees and you're surrounded by farm sounds: sheep being gathered; a horse snorting in the lucerne field... When you light your campfire, Scrunches the cat will settle at your feet. The dusk brings tranquillity, and tomorrow you get to drive that 15 km through the veld again...

Facilities: The trees offer enough shade for a big group of people to camp together. If there are two or three different groups on the same night, however, you will be close to each other. There are three stands, each with power and a braai.

The campsites share a kitchen area and a bathroom with one shower (gas geyser). You can swim in the big cement dam. There's no Wi-Fi or cellphone reception.

Where? Roughly halfway between Carnarvon and Vosburg via the R384 tar road. The 15 km farm road is in a good condition; you don't need a bakkie or a vehicle with high ground clearance.

Cost: R475 per stand for four people; plus R50 per extra person.

What else? Other accommodation on the farm includes a big house that sleeps 10 people, and Ou Waenhuis – a unit that sleeps four. Rates from R150 per person. You can also buy mutton, braai sausage, droëwors, biltong, Oom Plaas spices, honey, olives, jams and *boerseep* here.

Contact: 📞 083 268 1225 (send a WhatsApp); "Joosteswerwe Guest Farm" on Facebook

go! Take better photos



Unleash your creativity

REDISCOVER THE WORLD AROUND YOU WITH THESE
COMPREHENSIVE GO! PHOTO COURSES



FROM ZERO TO PHOTOGRAPHER

If you want to take better photos, but don't have the time to read the camera manual and figure out all the settings, this is the course for you! In this Photography

Course, you will master the basic principles of photography, understand your camera, and learn how to choose the right equipment and techniques for capturing stunning photos.

ONLY PAY R570
(normal price R900)

This one-off payment gives you unlimited access to 27 lessons. You can pay with a credit card or an immediate EFT through Payfast

**40%
DISCOUNT**
Until end
Sep'23

LEARN MORE ABOUT:

- Composition and framing
- Cell phone photography
- Post-production: editing and the right software
- Posting your images on social media
- Tips and tricks for all modules



CAPTURE THE NIGHT SKY

Our Night Photography Course is perfect for photographers who are already familiar with the basics and want to expand their knowledge to include the beautiful and elusive world of nighttime photography. In this 9-lesson course, you will learn how to shoot the moon, the Milky Way, and stars, and master the techniques for capturing beautiful nighttime shots.

COST R300

This one-off payment gives you unlimited access to 9 lessons. You can pay with a credit card or instant EFT via PayFast.

LEARN MORE ABOUT:

- General tips and tricks
- Making the moon the hero
- The Milky Way
- PhotoPills – what's that?
- Star trails

READ MORE AND BUY THE COURSES HERE:



[www.takebetterphotos.gomag.co.za/
course/photography-course/](http://www.takebetterphotos.gomag.co.za/course/photography-course/)

[www.takebetterphotos.gomag.co.za/
course/night-photography/](http://www.takebetterphotos.gomag.co.za/course/night-photography/)





In the land of the lion

On the Karoo Experience tour, you'll explore special corners of the Karoo National Park – you might see a lion – and private farms where fossils of ancient dassie-like creatures are waiting to be discovered. The bonus? You can put your 4x4 through its paces...

WORDS **PIERRE STEYN** PICTURES **RONEL STEYN**

Tour guide Douwe Vlok enjoys the sunrise from the top of the Nuweveld Mountains in the Karoo National Park.



KAROO TOUR

The sun is rising over one of the most scenic places on earth. At 1797m above sea level, Bilthoudersbank in the Nuweveld Mountains is the highest point in the Karoo National Park – you need a 4x4 to drive up the challenging jeep track to reach the microwave and cellphone towers on the peak.

Usually, visitors to the park can't come here. My wife Ronel and I are travelling with Douwe Vlok from Heuningland Tours and our guide is Johan Moolman, one of the park's honorary rangers. The four-day Karoo Experience tour has a special concession to explore parts of the park and private farms that you can't otherwise access.

From the top of Bilthoudersbank, it's almost as if you can see all the way to the world's end, to its last precipice. To the east, where the clouds are changing from purple to pomegranate pink, peaks and koppies are stacked towards Aberdeen, about 150km away. At our feet, the Nuweveld drops down to the south, terrace by terrace and kloof by kloof, where the lights of Beaufort West are still shining. Further south, over the vast plains of the Great Karoo, you can see the Swartberg about 120km away, where Meiringspoort wriggles through to the Little Karoo.

Our group drove here in the dark with Douwe and Johan. We all fall silent. It's a Tuesday morning in March, late summer, and only 6.15 am. Most of us are sitting on a rock, waiting for the first rays of sunlight to touch our cheeks.

But then a sound rumbles up the cliff, emerging from deep in one of the kloofs below – a goosebump moment. It's an ancient sound, from before the days of 30-06 rifles and even muzzleloaders. It's the roar of a lion. A second lion answers. Two

lions, looking for each other at daybreak.

Johan scans the landscape with his binoculars and finds them: dull yellow bodies exiting a kloof to walk across a green expanse. It feels like we're looking down on them from heaven. Then a third lion appears, and a fourth, and a fifth! Like a practised patrol, they stride off somewhere – maybe a waterhole? Or have they picked up the scent of a red hartebeest?

We won't find out today. The pride is swallowed by the distance and the thickets. We look at each other and smile. *This is why we got up early!*

DAY 1 Beautiful around Beaufort West

Yesterday, we met Douwe and his wife Liezl, the owners of Heuningland Tours, at Donkin Deli in Beaufort West. Douwe grew up in the area and owns a farm on the western border of the Karoo National Park. (*Douwe and Liezl also offer a great 103 km backpacking hike in the area – see go! #186. – Ed.*)

Over the next four days, they will show us some of the remote places in and around the park and we'll learn about the plants, animals, inhabitants and history of this region. Our travel companions are two couples from Cape Town, Alan and Toekie van der Berg, and Chris and Androëtte Faure. We'll all be driving our own 4x4 vehicles – sections of the route are rugged and you need high clearance and good traction.

Yesterday we were also introduced to Johan Moolman, the honorary ranger who will accompany us for three of the four days. He's a sheep farmer in the area and has a deep love of nature and a vast knowledge of the Karoo.

In Beaufort West, we fill our tanks one last time. About 2 km north of town on the N1, we turn left onto the R381 tar road towards Loxton. At the foot of Molteno Pass, the tar peters out and it feels great when our wheels hit the gravel.

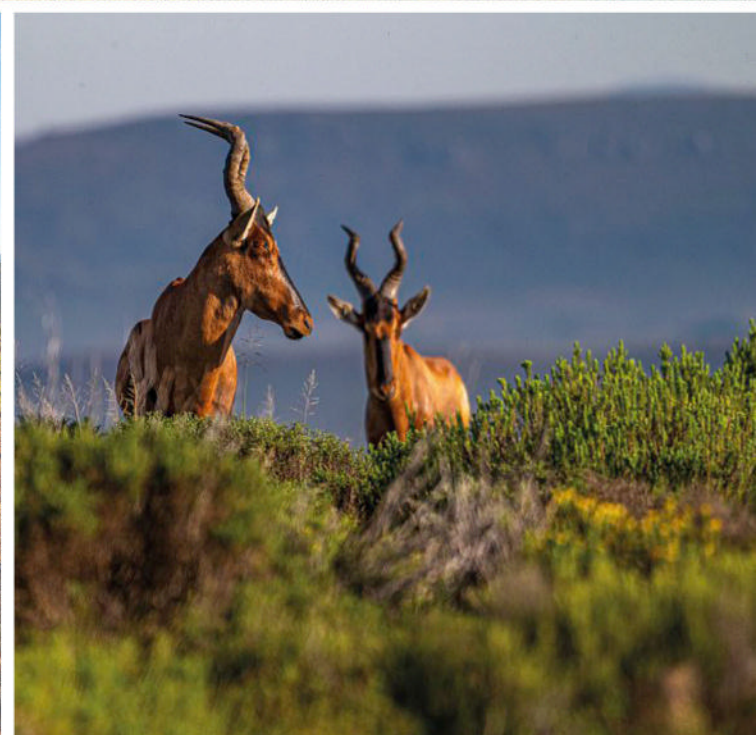
We're now on one of the oldest mountain passes in the country (it was completed in 1881), driving along an old mail coach route that was once the main road between the Western and Northern Cape. The pass is 15 km long and we climb about 650m to a plateau that's more than 1500m above sea level. The eastern border of the Karoo National Park stays on our left. Douwe gave each vehicle a two-way radio and he asks us to pull over on the pass. A mountain cabbage tree caught his eye.

Douwe says there's a *great story* and a *true story* about how this indigenous tree got its Afrikaans name: *bergkiepersol*. The great story goes like this: During the Anglo-Boer War, a group of British soldiers hid from Boer forces in one of these trees. As they climbed the branches, one of the soldiers called out: "This tree can't keep us all!" Over time, "keep-us-all" became "kiepersol".

The true story is that the tree's canopy looks like an umbrella, or a parasol.

Not far from here, high in the Nuweveld Mountains, we turn off the R381. Johan gets out and unlocks one of the "back gates" of the park. We crawl along jeep tracks to Mountain View, a camp for the park's honorary rangers. It consists of rondavels (equipped with beds and mattresses) at one of the original farmsteads dating from before the park's proclamation in 1979.

We unpack quickly because it's getting late and Johan wants to take us to a special viewpoint to have sundowners.



Clockwise from the top: At Mountain View – the honorary rangers' camp in the park – there's shade and a big boma perfect for braaiing under the stars. Red hartebeest obligingly pose for a photo. This intact ancient stone trap in the park, called a "*wolwehok*", was used by the first sheep farmers to catch brown hyenas.

Opposite, clockwise from the top: A brewing Karoo thunderstorm adds drama to the fossil hunt. This well preserved example of a *Diictodon* was found years ago on the farm Dunedin – the tour group also discovered another fossil (pictured to the left) on their walk. Grey-winged francolins are having their own breakfast club. You spend your last night of the tour at Amandelboom, a large, comfortable farmhouse. Honorary ranger and farmer Johan with his wife Marietha Moolman in their shearing shed.

It's a 20-minute drive to the viewpoint on top of the escarpment and we get to see another of the honorary rangers' secrets – a renovated mountain cabin with views to the south and west. We set up our camping chairs on the flat roof of the cabin and before long we spot a pair of Verreaux's eagles in the sky with our binoculars.

"This is one of the best sunsets I've ever seen," I tell Douwe.

"Wait until you see the sunrise tomorrow morning," he says with a smile.

DAY 2 Fossils and fun

Last night we braaied mutton chops, hung out around the campfire for a while and went to bed early. Seeing the sunrise at Bilthoudersbank means setting our alarms for 5 am. Douwe was spot on in his prediction that the view would be spectacular – and with the added bonus of five lions, no one is complaining.

On the way back to camp, where Liezl is preparing breakfast, we pull over to look at an old "*wolwehok*" – a stone trap with a piece of slate as a door. It was used by the first livestock farmers in the Karoo to catch brown hyenas – the "wolves" that killed their lambs and calves. These shy hyenas are now protected within the borders of the national park.

Johan points out succulents, shrubs and flowers. The century plant in particular draws the eye. In spring, you'll see its beautiful pink and red flowers; by the end of October these flowers produce a big seedhead that breaks off and tumbles across the veld to distribute its seeds. The green leaves stay behind and fan out from the bulb – they can be seen year-round, alongside wild rosemary, cancer bush and snapdragons. The other common names of the century

plant – poison bulb and sore-eye flower – warn that this is not an edible bulb!

Our breakfast turns into brunch because we stop to take photos of red hartebeest, grey rhebok and eland along the way. A raucous family of grey-winged francolins scramble around next to our vehicles, as if to hurry us along.

After brunch we leave the park through the same gate we used to enter. Now we turn left onto the R381 towards Loxton. Our destination is Johan and his wife Marietha's farm Dunedin, where we'll stay in their self-catering house, Riverine Rabbit Retreat.

In the afternoon, we walk into the ridges of Dunedin with Johan. The layers of sedimentary rock read like a historical account of the last few hundred million years. The Great Karoo is a treasure trove of Therapsida fossils, which have helped palaeontologists trace the evolution of reptiles to mammals.

"It's amazing what you can learn by walking in the veld and paying attention to your surroundings," says Johan. His interest in palaeontology was sparked by what world experts found on his farm and elsewhere in the district.

He has his stone hammer and brush on hand as we climb in single file. We're looking for fossils of a *Diictodon* (a type of *Therapsid*) that lived in the area about 255 million years ago. You could call it the dassie of the ancient Karoo because it was about the same size and just as abundant.

A storm brews to the north and the thunder and lightning add to the dramatic atmosphere of our search.

Johan kneels down and carefully sweeps his brush over what looks like just another rock. Almost immediately I make out a large eye socket in a skull. As the brush is

pulled away, a sharp tooth appears on the side of a tortoise-like beak.

We leave the fossil in its resting place where it will hopefully remain for another few million years. The first raindrops are starting to fall and we quickly return to our vehicles for the 10-minute drive to Riverine Rabbit Retreat. Beams of light bore through the bulging clouds to illuminate patches of veld.

"The Bushmen called these the legs of the rain animal. Isn't it beautiful?" Johan says.

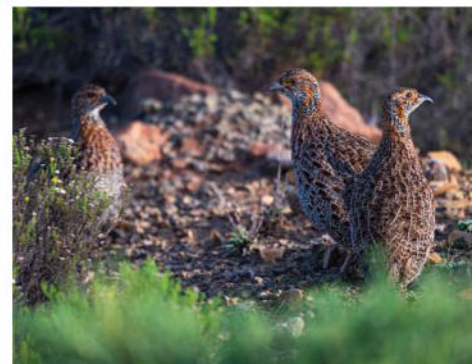
"Everything is beautiful," says Ronel as she tries to look everywhere at once.

DAY 3 Merino farming 101

This morning we get a closer look at the Moolmans' sheep farm. In the shearing shed, Johan tells us how heavy each bale of wool is (180 kg), how often the merinos are sheared (once every eight months) and how much wool each fleece produces (5 kg). Michale May and Damon Kok demonstrate how to shear a sheep by hand. It's hard work – my back would never survive it!

Afterwards, we say goodbye to Johan and Marietha and drive to the farm Sakrivierspoort, owned by Marianne and Martin Scholtz. It's lunchtime and Marianne has baked fresh bread, which we enjoy in the garden with apricot jam and *moerkoffie*. Sakrivierspoort is known for its garlic. We taste a jar of pickled garlic and Marianne has to go fetch more from her pantry – we all want to buy a jar to take home.

Our destination for the day is Amandelboom, a farmhouse that sleeps 16 people. You can lounge around on the stoep or doze off with a book on your chest in front of the big fireplace in the living area. Douwe waits for another thunderstorm to pass before he lights one last braai fire.



KAROO TOUR



Clockwise from the top: Early livestock farmers in the Great Karoo built corbelled houses like this to provide shelter. The Vloks are your guides on this tour – from left Douwe-Tempel, Liezl and Douwe. A black springbok looks like it just woke up after a hard night's pronging.

JOIN A HEUNINGLAND TOUR

The Karoo Experience is a self-drive tour in your own 4x4 over four days and three nights. You'll be accompanied by a professional Heuningland guide. Included in the price are three meals per day, all park fees, accommodation for three nights and the use of two-way radios, cutlery and crockery. Bring your own snacks and drinks, and a sleeping bag and a pillow for the first night's stay in the rondavels in the honorary rangers' camp. Bedding is supplied at the other accommodation.

Dates: 19 – 22 October 2023; 28 February – 2 March 2024; 10 – 13 October 2024

Cost: R5 440 per person in 2023; R5 880 in 2024.

More info: 📞 072 2435 251 (Liezl Vlok); ✉️ info@heuningland.com; 🌐 heuningland.com

DAY 4 Over cliffs and kloofs

It's the last day of our tour. The jeep track that takes us down the escarpment and over private land to an end point close to Beaufort West is the reason you need a 4x4 for this tour. Ronel and I are travelling in our Suzuki Jimny. Sometimes we have to cross a river or climb a rocky hill in low-range, or carefully make our way down a slope in a kloof full of sweet thorns.

The terrain isn't technical and no one needs to get out to indicate the right line, but it's one of those fun drives that makes me turn to Ronel and say: "Now *this* is why we bought Suzi-Q!"

We take it slow and often stop to take photos, like at the lonely 140-year-old corbelled house on the western border of the Karoo National Park. The early livestock farmers who carefully stacked these stones in concentric circles knew what they were doing. Inside, you can still see the soot of long-forgotten fires. I wonder how it must have felt to sleep here under a kaross on a cold winter's night?

After our encounter with the park's lions, it feels fitting to end our tour on the dirt road between Fraserburg and Beaufort West. We pull over at the ditch where Sylvester, the most famous of the park's lions, crawled under the fence to freedom in 2015 and again in 2016.

Like us, he must have wanted to get to know his heartland a bit better.



#TankwaTrek IS

A RIDE LIKE NO OTHER

**THE ULTIMATE TEST OF SKILLS,
AMONGST THE WORLD'S BEST**

JOIN US

at South Africa's
Premier 4-day
mountain bike race

UCI EVENT

WORLD-CLASS ROUTES

4 DAYS | 286 KM | 5750 M

SPECTACULAR RACE VILLAGE

www.tankwatrek.co.za



8 -11 FEBRUARY

2024

CERES | WESTERN CAPE



The storyteller of Montagu

Join **Marchelle van Zyl** on a two-wheeled tour of her town and you'll learn about history, art and the exploits of more than one *kwaai tannie*.

WORDS & PICTURES JON MINSTER

Marchelle van Zyl emerges from the Montagu Country Hotel on a crisp autumn morning, wearing a newsboy cap, a tie and blazer, khaki trousers tucked into yellow socks and a pair of tan velvskoens. Not your typical cycling attire, but this is not a typical cycle tour. It's the weekend of the Eroica festival – an Italian-themed celebration of all things to do with vintage bikes – and Marchelle is about to show our group of old-school aficionados around her town.

She leads us into Bath Street outside the hotel and we set off towards Montagu's imposing Dutch Reformed church, built in the neo-gothic style by the trader Joseph Barry in the middle 1800s (nearby Barrydale carries his name) and paid for by the church itself after selling property and taxing the landowners.

We gather nearby and Marchelle begins her tour with a tale about a cat named Heather who had an almost supernatural ability to sense when someone needed comfort. Heather roamed the streets in the 1990s, popping in to cheer up the sick and sad. But her roaming was perilous and her owner campaigned

to have the municipality erect a "cat crossing" sign to warn motorists about the caring feline. The sign is still there today.

It's immediately clear how passionate Marchelle is about her subject matter. She conveys the wonder and weirdness of the Karoo with a sense of humour that's contagious.

"The Karoo is in my DNA," she tells me later. "I grew up in Prince Albert, went to school in Beaufort West and spent most of my childhood holidays with my *ouma* in Ladismith at the foot of the Swartberg."

After working abroad for 14 years – as a teacher in the UK and then on cruise ships in North America and the Caribbean – Marchelle lived in Cape Town for a while, but she says she always felt like a stranger passing through.

"When the opportunity arose to move back to the Karoo, it was a no-brainer," she says. "Montagu ticked all the boxes for me: It's a well-preserved small town with lots of caring people; it's surrounded by nature and mountains; there are plenty of gravel roads and trails, and there's no mall... But I think Montagu chose me. When you drive through Cogmanskloof and you go through the hole in the mountain, it's like going down Alice's rabbit hole – you are changed forever."

Marchelle's tour business is called Flying Feet and it came about as the result of a happy accident.

"I discovered some bicycles that the University of Stellenbosch was selling – back-pedal, Dutch-style bikes I thought would be perfect for exploring Montagu. I went to buy two and walked away with 11!

"The only problem was they were in a bad shape and I had to do lots of restoration work to get them going again. They were also quite drab, so I asked my artist friend Hanna Naudé if she could paint one. Next thing I knew, she'd got other artists together and we had a bicycle-painting party on her lawn! Each one is unique – you're actually riding a piece of art.

"I loved riding around Beaufort West when I was young. It was my first taste of freedom, on my own without adult supervision, pretending to be Supergirl. It felt like I was flying, which is where the inspiration for the name Flying Feet comes from."

As fun as it is, you don't have to know how to ride a bike to enjoy one of Marchelle's tours. She also offers walking tours, guided hikes and one of Montagu's most interesting outings, a ghost tour.

"I grew up with ghost stories," she says. "Strange and inexplicable things that happened – things that suggest there might be something



out there that we haven't properly tapped into.

"Most people have a spooky story to tell, even though they might say they don't believe in ghosts. The word has negative connotations; I prefer to think of ghosts as 'spirits' or even 'angels' – most religions believe in life after death. My ghost tour takes people through the historical centre of Montagu; I tell people stories about the past, interspersed with some strange encounters..."

Every town needs a kwaai tannie

We roll along Bath Street and turn down a gravel track called Lover's Walk, which takes us over the Keisie River and into Montagu West. This part of town, tucked between the mountains and the river, was previously a tough, working-class neighbourhood – Marchelle describes how a gate would sometimes be locked by the police to keep the residents in their corner! These days, however, it's one of the most desirable addresses around. We pedal through dappled sunlight past beautiful smallholdings and renovated cottages. One such cottage – bright blue – used to be a house of ill repute and the new owner has hinted at such in its name. But you'll have to let Marchelle elaborate when you do your own tour!

We roll on and pause again near another church called St Mildred's, where Marchelle regales us with the story of Sophy Gray, the artist, architect and wife of Robert Gray, the first Anglican archbishop of Cape Town. Sophy adventured across the country on horseback in the 19th century and designed at least 40 beautiful churches in fledgling towns throughout the Karoo and beyond. (*Another such church is in Victoria West – see #19 on our list of 101 Karoo Classics, page 85.*) A creative force of nature, who lived and worked in

a male-dominated world, Sophy is the definition of what Marchelle calls a "*kwaai tannie*".

"Every town needs one, and Montagu has been blessed with a few," she says.

Our next stop is near the confluence of the Keisie and Kingna rivers, where there's a monument showing a few significant flood levels in Montagu's history. A chat about the geology and geography of the area leads to a story about another *kwaai tannie*, Esther Hofmeyr, the former head of the historical society who was a legend among Montagu locals.

In 1981, the same storm that caused the infamous Laingsburg flood also caused Montagu's rivers to burst their banks. The floodwaters damaged many of the town's older buildings and the municipality quickly condemned them for demolition. Not under Esther's watch!

Marchelle beams with admiration as she describes how Esther used sneaky tactics to obtain legal authorisation to prevent the demolitions; she even went so far as chaining herself to a building to stop the wrecking machines. Her efforts saved much of the character of the town and the building she chained herself to was named in her honour: the Hofmeyr Community Hall.

Marchelle leads us back to the hotel, her blazer flapping lazily as she rides, and I can't help but wonder if she's Montagu's next *kwaai tannie*. Maybe not in the angry sense of the word, but definitely in the "cool", slang sense. By making history so accessible and fun, and by telling stories the way she does, she's doing just as important a job as designing churches, saving heritage buildings and getting street signs erected to protect the local cats.

We're nearly back at the start of the tour but Marchelle isn't done yet. There's always time for one last story. "You'll never believe what they found here, where we're standing, when they were digging foundations..."



SEE THE TOWN WITH FLYING FEET

Hire one of Marchelle's bicycles and explore Montagu on your own, or book a guided historical, art or ghost tour. Besides the Dutch bikes, Flying Feet also has mountain bikes and e-bikes.

Marchelle also offers walking tours and guided hikes in the area, including a three-day luxury slackpacking retreat where you stay in town and explore different hiking routes each day while eating and drinking good food and wine.

Rates: Bike hire from R50 per hour; town tour from R250 per person; guided hike from R450 per person; slackpacking escape from R6 600 per person sharing.

More info: ☎ 076 891 3623;

📍 flyingfeet.co.za;

@flyingfeet_southafrica on Instagram

The view of Montagu West from Kanonkop – a koppie in town accessed via Kohler Street.



MARCHELLE'S MONTAGU FAVOURITES

You arrive in town late on a Friday. Where's the best place to grab a bite to eat?

We have a few great pop-in places: Piccolo Tesoro (☎ 076 246 7402) or the Burgundy Gherkin for pizza (☎ 023 614 3734) or Mitchell's (☎ 023 614 3013) for pub food and a banter with the locals.

If you have time and you want a special dinner, my favourites are 22 Church Street (☎ 023 614 1200) and the Grill Room at Mimosa Lodge (☎ 023 614 2351).

Best spot for a lazy Sunday lunch? Die Stal (☎ 082 324 4318) is about 5 km outside town – they serve farm-style cuisine. BluVines District (☎ 023 614 1663) has a wide

menu, including excellent steaks and burgers, and a beautiful view of Aasvoëlkrans, a cliff face south of town.

The Rambling Rose (☎ 083 401 4503) is centrally located and a good option for a café-style lunch, or head to the Montagu Country Hotel (☎ 023 614 3125) for old-world charm.

Where should I go for wine tasting? Definitely BluVines District and Montagu Wines (☎ 023 614 1125). If you don't want to drive, do the Wine Valley Safari (🐾 winevalley safari.com), which stops at a selection of excellent wine farms in the Robertson Valley, like Weltevrede, Springfield, De Wetshof and Kleinhoekkloof.

Best coffee? The Pastry Place (☎ 082 447 4888) is a must-stop in town. The Barn on 62 (☎ 023 614 1196) also has great coffee.

What's the top day hike in town? My favourite short and flat hike (6 km) is into Donkerkloof to the first waterfall. A more challenging (but very rewarding!) half-day hike is the Cogmanskloof Trail (about 12 km), and the best day hike (very challenging) is to the summit of Bloupunt (about 15 km).

What's your favourite cycling loop? The new single-track behind Montagu South is excellent. It's a beautiful route with great scenery

and perfect for an hour's workout (about 11 – 14 km).

For a longer, rolling gravel ride, I love the Talana via Leeurivier loop (about 50 km). And if I'm after a tough ride with some proper climbing, the Joubert Pass loop (about 44 km) never disappoints.

Your favourite events on the local calendar? The Herb Festival (22 – 25 September 2023); Eroica (autumn; 🐾 eroica.cc) and the Montagu Book Festival (winter; find them on Facebook).

Visit 🐾 montagu-ashton.info for more; turn to page 110 – 111 for other things to do and see around Montagu.

Space is the place

On this adventure through the districts of Hanover, Murraysburg, Nieu-Bethesda and Graaff-Reinet, you'll meet people who have stretched their wings in the big, beautiful spaces offered by the Karoo.

WORDS & PICTURES **TOAST COETZER**

I'm one of the lucky ones. I was born in 1977 in Cradock and the Karoo has always been the most special place in the world to me. I know its landscapes, plants and animals. That dassie over there... I can spot it within seconds. The outline of a shepherd's tree, same story. A donga: I know it's the result of overgrazing decades ago. Those sisal plants? They were planted to curb that erosion.

On this trip, I revisited some favourite places and had the chance to see completely new ones. Some of the people I've known since I was a student, others I met more recently. On Facebook of all places! Our commonality? A shared love of the Karoo.

The Karoo has changed since my childhood. Landowners think differently about how you can put a farm to work. Some have gone organic; others have opted for tourism. Game fences criss-cross the region and the eastern edges are being overrun by incomers from the bushveld, like warthogs. Some towns look considerably worse for wear compared to how I remember them, but others – like Prince Albert, Graaff-Reinet, Loxton and Merweville – have become cool addresses for city folk who have bought old houses, fixed them up and moved in lock, stock and Wi-Fi router.

But just because a Karoo town has a hip coffee shop doesn't mean it's easy to make a living out here. It's hard work for a farmer to fill his shearing shed with wool bales at the end of the season, and it's just as tough for a shop owner in town to turn a profit.

There are no guarantees out here. Just this: The sun will rise in the morning.

Hanover

It's a good thing the sun will rise because PC Ferreira, owner of New Holme Nature Lodge, has just put his entire guest farm onto solar power! It's not the first time PC has tackled a daunting task – it was probably way more stressful the time he reintroduced hippos to the Karoo...

New Holme Nature Lodge is just off the N1, north-east of Hanover, which makes it a perfect starting point for a Karoo journey if you're coming from Bloemfontein or Joburg. With a bit of luck you'll be here during lambing season and you can join Elsie van Wyk and Vytjie Bosman when they feed the *hanslammers* out of Castle Lite bottles.

It was my great privilege to grow up on a farm where feeding the *hanslammers* was a childhood task. These "orphan" lambs, rejected by their mothers for whatever reason, must be raised by hand. If you grew

up in a city, there's no way you'd ever encounter this. A visit to the Karoo, and a guest farm like New Holme, opens you up to this sensory experience: You smell their warm, happy bodies and the foaming milk around their mouths; you hear the *tsoek-tsoek-tsoek* sucking noises and the snorting sound as the bottle empties.

After breakfast, PC drives me to the neighbouring farm where we see San rock engravings. Near the engravings, another wonder awaits: a gong rock! PC takes a smaller rock and hits the gong rock in certain places to make it ring across the veld. These gong rocks were used by the San for rituals in years gone by.

PC wants to honour the legacy of the San, which is why he calls his whole setup the Khoisan Karoo Conservancy. To someone else, these might seem like worthless, empty spaces; but to PC, his stretch of Karoo is irreplaceable. And since he's here, he might as well try to restore it. That's why he decided to bring hippos back to the Seekoei River in 2005. (Hippos were hunted to local extinction back in 1778.)

Only one hippo – a bull – remains today, but PC wants to give it another go: He's looking for funding to bring in a couple of females so they can start breeding again.

We search among the reed-lined river for the hippo, but he eludes us.



Sunset outside Murraysburg, Western Cape

ROAD TRIP

Elsewhere, we see a herd of buffalo, some blue cranes, eland and a few sable antelope. With their long, sabre-like horns, they're like Trojan warriors on the grass plain.

Murraysburg

When you get out of your car in the main road of Murraysburg, everyone looks at you for a moment – you're a new person in town. A bakkie might rattle past every now and then, but Murraysburg lacks the frenetic bustle of a town on a major artery, like Beaufort West.

Jan-Hendrik and Michelle Swiegers lived at Val de Vie near Paarl but made the move back to Jan-Hendrik's old home town in 2020. In the Cape, Jan-Hendrik was in property development and Michelle ran a busy events venue. The two met in the early 2000s while working abroad in Scotland. Jan-Hendrik was the barman in a pub; Michelle was the chef.

"We've been visiting Jan-Hendrik's family in Murraysburg for around 18 years, since we got together," Michelle says. We're sitting around their kitchen table with their three kids. "We already knew a lot of people here – it wasn't a major adjustment."

Cooking is still one of Michelle's favourite things – she bakes pies, which she sells frozen, and occasionally she presents cooking classes at their guesthouse, Colonial Karoo, a few houses down the street.

"But we came to the Karoo to live at a quieter pace," she says. "So, I'm not putting myself under pressure to bake 20 pies a day!"

"We love living here," Jan-Hendrik adds. "It's much easier to make a positive impact in a small town. In a city, you can't. Your efforts just disappear."

In Murraysburg, Jan-Hendrik has rejuvenated a few properties. Putting his property development skills to work, he's bought up old houses,

restored them and put them up for rental.

The food we're eating for breakfast mostly comes from the area: the sausage was made with eland meat (Jan-Hendrik shot the eland in the Sneeuberg); the eggs are from their own chickens; the mulberry jam is from fruit out of their garden; and the milk is from a nearby farm called Rooipoort.

"This is luxury," Jan-Hendrik says, gesturing to the bounty on the table. "People think Woolworths is luxury, but if you know what life is about, then real luxury is when you can eat from your own garden."

I first saw Jan-Hendrik's name on Facebook thanks to the beautiful Karoo landscape photos he started posting. (He also took the cover photo for this guide.) After breakfast, we head out onto the so-called Sneeuberg road – it loops off the R63 east of town. Jan-Hendrik wants to show me some of his favourite scenes.

We spend the rest of the day in my kind of heaven. We visit farms where he knows the owners and marvel at stone kraal walls and poplar groves and spurwing geese and mountain reedbeek. It's early winter but the veld is wet after good rain: We see waterfalls tumbling off cliffs and we swish through *driffies* running wide with clear spring water.

When we turn back to town at sunset, we're beaming. A day in the mountains is refreshing. That's another thing the Karoo is: a tonic!

Nieu-Bethesda

Long ago, when I was a student, our photojournalism class did a field trip to Nieu-Bethesda. We stayed at Doornberg Guest Farm at the foot of Compassberg – the home of the Van Heerdens. Over several visits since, I grew close to the family. When I heard about the death of Peet and Hanna's son, Petrus, in a motorbike accident in 2021, and

then of Hanna's death due to Covid complications soon after, I was shocked. On top of this, Peet also got sick: He had to have back surgery, then he was diagnosed with colon cancer, then he had a heart attack that required a bypass.

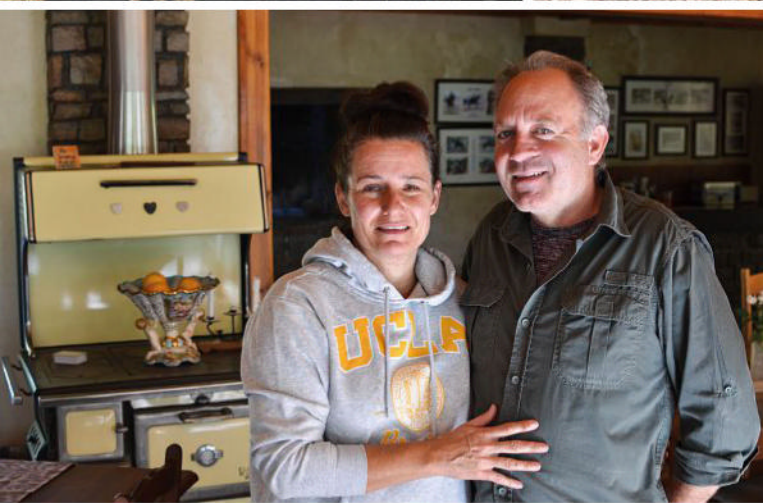
I felt powerless when all this bad news reached me. All I promised myself was that I'd go and visit Peet to see how he was doing. I've always known him as larger than life, with a big smile on his face and a naughty twinkle in the eye. To stay at Doornberg was special because Peet and Hanna had the ability to make you feel like part of the family.

Leaving Murraysburg, I take a winding back road (the Swaelkrans road) to give myself enough time to prepare for seeing him again. Along the way, I drive past springbok rams that look like they're on steroids, I see the most beautiful farmhouses where I wish I lived, I find farmer Stuart Minnaar in the kraal with his sheep and spend a few minutes shooting the breeze. Later in the afternoon, I even encounter not one but two aardwolf!

I need not have worried about Peet. His smile is still there and so is his lust for life. I bought one of Michelle's huge Murraysburg pies and I invite Peet to dinner. We enjoy the meal in front of the fireplace while Peet tells me about one of his visits to the hospital in George to get chemo. It was late at night and he felt a bit sorry for himself, so he messaged one of his church friends back in Nieu-Bethesda. Within minutes, the WhatsApps streamed in – 140 of them, all from friends sending him encouragement.

"Since then, I've made a point of being in church whenever we have a service," he says. "So those people who sent me messages can see me there. It's my way of thanking them."

Peet recently completed his chemotherapy and is cancer-free.



Clockwise from top left: Elsie van Wyk feeds the *hanslammers* at New Holme Nature Lodge near Hanover. The San are believed to have used a gong rock like this during their rain ceremonies. An eland photographed in the Khoisan Karoo Conservancy. The Swiegers family of Murraysburg, from left: Karien (12), Nala the hound, Christiaan (14), Jan-Hendrik, Janika (7) and Michelle. This dirt street leads to The Brewery and Two Goats Deli in Nieu-Bethesda. A flock of sheep on the Swaelkrans road outside Murraysburg. Marisca and PC Ferreira in the dining room of New Holme Nature Lodge.

ROAD TRIP

The next morning, I drive to town to visit two of his daughters – a third lives in Cape Town. Elbé owns The Village Inn restaurant, where I order a breakfast burger and coffee. We sit on the stoep, watching townsfolk walk past. Everyone greets Elbé. Later, her sister Niki pulls in. She opens her laptop and finishes some design work for an overseas client.

This kind of remote working has become part of the way we live. You can serve clients in New York while living in Nieu-Bethesda. And later, you can stroll home along a gravel street while a baboon shouts *howzit* from a cliff.

Yes, you might encounter a baboon on the edge of Cape Town, but a small town's sense of community is hard to replicate in a city. Where else will you receive 140 messages to cheer you up? And when last did everyone who walked past greet you by name?

Graaff-Reinet

Few Karoo towns are as beautifully situated as Graaff-Reinet. The centre of town is anchored by a tall, proud church spire; to the south-west, spekboom-clad Spandaukop tips its floppy hat. You feel a sense of purpose among pedestrians in the streets: places to go, people to see. (Does your dog eat Montego? It's made here in Graaff-Reinet!)

My friends Dawid and Karlien de Wet moved here in 2018. They're the couple behind the travel business Toerboer; I'm staying in one of their cottages called The Tradesman Shop.

Dawid takes me on a type of treasure hunt through town – a fun tour he also offers tourists. You go from one establishment to the next (shops, eateries, maybe a monument or art gallery) and along the way you have to ask whoever works at the place a question. The answers will help you to complete your mini quest and you end up meeting some of the movers and shakers who have

energised the town in recent years.

Among others, I meet: MC van Rensburg, the owner of Slater & Dutch (they make beautiful leather bags); Jen Rubidge of Lot 44 (stylish, mid-century furniture); and Liezl Smith, co-owner of Made It (handmade items such as knitwear). Elsewhere, I stand amazed in front of Rembrandt prints in the Jan Rupert Art Centre, taste a shot of local tequila Three Agaves, and enjoy a few minutes of silence in the empty pews of the Dutch Reformed church. (Don't worry, the tequila happened after the church part...)

With the towns in my rear-view mirror, I go in search of real Karoo wilderness. A type of "re-wilding" has happened in recent decades, in the sense that many former livestock farms have been turned into game farms. Big animals that have been absent from the landscape for centuries have been brought back: white rhino, lion, elephant, buffalo, giraffe and cheetah.

You can see all of these at Samara Karoo Reserve between Graaff-Reinet and Pearston. Samara has been on my travel wish list for years and I lucked out by scoring a freebie two-night stay, courtesy of their marketing team.

My visit to Samara is an eye-opener. I've visited all the Karoo's national parks (Mountain Zebra, Karoo, Camdeboo) and some of its provincial reserves, but never a private reserve like Samara. The project proves you *can* create a world-class attraction in the middle of nowhere. It's not easy to do, and it costs money: You have to buy game, erect high fences and employ skilled staff.

The people who work at Samara are incredible: Veronica le Gransie who welcomes me at reception and when I return from a game drive (with one of those warm little hand towels); barman Clayton Hoffman who entertains me with banter after

dinner; and guide Evert Hauptfleisch and tracker Handro Billet, who impress with their knowledge and skills.

I thought I knew this part of the Karoo. After all, I went to school in nearby Somerset East and drove past this stretch of the Camdeboo Plains whenever we played sport against a Graaff-Reinet school. It's not unusual for farms in this area to have kudu, springbok and maybe some mountain reedbuck, but Samara is a rare window into what kind of wilderness it used to be when the earliest European explorers ventured into the South African interior.

Evert takes me to the plateau where we see eland, black wildebeest and blesbok. There are also several wildebeest carcasses – the favourite prey of the Samara lion pride. On the *vlaktes* below, we see huge kori bustards, (dehorned) rhinos and even two cheetahs. We stop at shepherd's trees, study small spoor and park at a dam at sunset to enjoy a G&T with a sprig of *karoobossie*.

Afterwards, we drive back to the lodge. Night falls and at some point we stop to look at the first stars. Satellites whir soundlessly overhead, one of which is the International Space Station. From up there, Graaff-Reinet's lights must be insignificant (or non-existent during loadshedding) and no astronaut is aware of Evert and Handro and me, standing here next to the bakkie.

But, in many ways, three humans in the Karoo are more important than three humans in space. We are here, where we can make a difference if we put our backs into it. Like the Ferreiras of Hanover, the Swiegers family of Murraysburg, the Van Heerdens of Nieu-Bethesda and all the wonderful people I met in Graaff-Reinet.

The Karoo has seen people and their destructive habits come and go. But it's a patient place, which offers a different kind of "space" – space to gaze inward and to heal in ways you wouldn't believe.



Clockwise from top left: Peet van Heerden of Doornberg Guest Farm near Nieu-Bethesda. Farmer Stuart Minnaar with his sheep, with Compassberg in the distance. Ben Witbooi sells cement art outside the Owl House in Nieu-Bethesda. Dawid de Wet, owner of Toerboer, with Spandaukop in the background. The Fossil Museum at Ganora Guest Farm outside Nieu-Bethesda has an impressive collection of animal and plant fossils. Ask Henry Witbooi (also known as Pankie) to show you the rock paintings near Ganora's farmstead.



KHOISAN KAROO CONSERVANCY



COLONIAL KAROO BOUTIQUE GUESTHOUSE



WE STAYED HERE

Khoisan Karoo Conservancy

New Holme Nature Lodge has six rooms at their Homestead, and seven Stable Rooms. Twin-sleeper unit R1 100 per night; four-sleeper R1 998.

The Stoffelsrus Log Cabin (self-catering) sleeps four: R2 400 p.n. The Garden Tents (each sleeps four) cost R790 p.n. – with shared ablution facilities.

They have another property nearby called the Hanover Aardvark Nature Reserve. Stay in the Mieliefontein guesthouse for R890 p.n. (twin room) or R1 585 p.n. (four-sleeper room).

The Mieliefontein self-catering flat (pet-friendly) sleeps four and costs R450 p.p. sharing. The Wolmado farmhouse sleeps up to 12: R2 950 p.n. for the whole house.

They offer tasty meals, which must be booked in advance. Dinner at New Holme costs

R250 p.p.; breakfast R115. Dinner at Mieliefontein costs R210 p.p.; breakfast R95.

What else? Do a sunset drive to see the hippo of the Seekoei River (R190 p.p.) or get up at the crack of dawn for a birding drive (R270 p.p.) to see blue crane and Ludwig's bustard. The excursion to the San rock art and the Shy Five night drive both cost R290 p.p. During the latter, you might see rare animals like aardvark, aardwolf, porcupine, bat-eared fox and black-footed cat (super rare!). Overnight guests can fish in the Seekoei River.

New Holme Nature Lodge is part of Cape Country Routes – see capecountryroutes.co.za for more info.

Where? Off the N1, about 33 km north-east of Hanover.

Contact: ☎ 064 652 3230; 📧 khoisankaroo.co.za

Colonial Karoo Boutique Guesthouse

This large, stylish guesthouse is in the (quiet) centre of Murraysburg – it's a good base to explore the town on foot.

It's well equipped for self-catering and you can park your car safely in the backyard. It costs R1 400 p.n. for two people sharing, or book the whole house (space for six) for R3 000 p.n. Breakfast and dinner available on request.

What else? Co-owner Michelle Swiegers presents cooking classes for groups of up to 12 people. It's a social affair and usually involves an exploration of different food cultures. It all ends with a feast at the long table under the almond tree in the back garden of the guesthouse. Rate: R650 p.p. for the full-day course – the next one is scheduled for October 2023. Contact Michelle

at the number below.

Michelle makes delicious (and huge – 1 kg!) pies, which she sells frozen for R160 each. They own another guesthouse in Graaff-Reinet called 55 On Park.

Where? 21 Voortrekker Street, Murraysburg

Contact: ☎ 072 905 0656 (Michelle); 📧 colonialkaroo.co.za

Doornberg Guest Farm

Doornberg is a proper farm. Driving towards the homestead, you'll see sheep and horses, and a friendly dog will come running up to greet you.

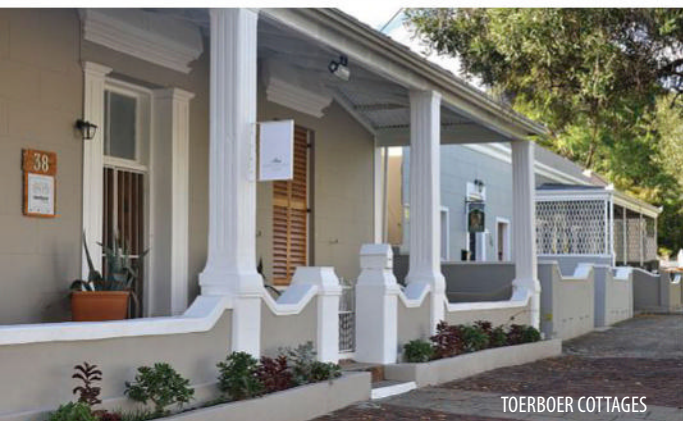
Accommodation is self-catering and costs R450 p.p. sharing. The neat house behind the main farmstead is great for a bigger group – it sleeps nine people with three bathrooms. The Schoolhouse and the Stable Flat each sleep four. The Rondavel sleeps three.



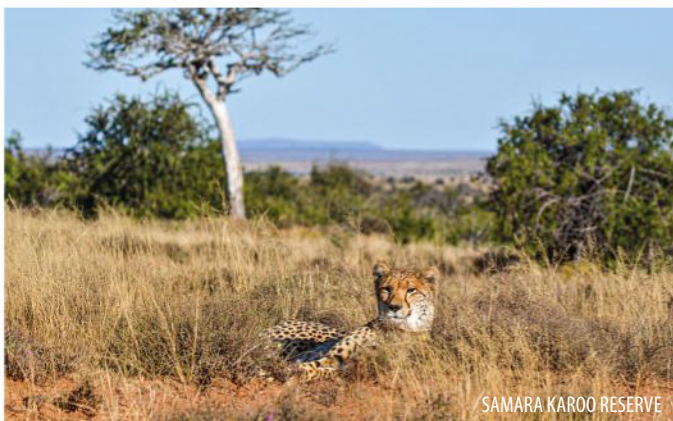
DOORNBERG GUEST FARM



EVERT HAUPTFLEISCH AND HANDRO BILLET, SAMARA



TOERBOER COTTAGES



SAMARA KAROO RESERVE

Kids aged 2 – 12 pay R225 each; younger kids stay for free. Bring your mountain bike or go for a stroll on the farm tracks.

Where? About 9 km north-west of Nieu-Bethesda.

Contact: ☎ 082 308 6375 (Alismi); ✉ alismivanheerden@gmail.com

Ganora Guest Farm

Your hosts Hester and JP Steynberg and their staff will ensure that you sleep comfortably and eat very well! Stretch your legs on one of their short trails, all of which start at the farmstead. Standard rooms from R650 p.p. sharing (includes breakfast); bigger rooms from R830. Kids under 12 pay half-price. The self-catering cottage sleeps six and costs R2 400 p.n.

A three-course dinner costs R240 p.p. (two-course R210) and lunch costs R120 p.p. Meals are served in the dining hall next to

the Fossil Museum – the walls are decorated with old farm tools.

What else? A visit to their Fossil Museum is highly recommended: R70 p.p. A longer, guided Fossil Walk costs R200 p.p. There are San rock paintings to see, and an interesting carving from the Anglo-Boer War at the same site: R110 p.p. Go on a Veld Plant Walk with guide Henry Witbooi, who will teach you more about medicinal uses of different plants: R120 p.p.

Where? About 7 km east of Nieu-Bethesda.

Contact: ☎ 082 698 0029 (Hester); ✉ ganora.co.za

Toerboer Cottages

These self-catering cottages cost R400 p.p. sharing. The Voetpad Cottage sleeps four; The Tradesman Shop also sleeps four, two of which must be young children.

What else? Toerboer offers a wide variety of excursions in and around Graaff-Reinet: You can enjoy breakfast overlooking the Valley of Desolation or do a day visit to Murraysburg or Nieu-Bethesda. Fit mountain-lovers can do the Karoo 3 Peaks Challenge – you climb Compassberg, Nardousberg and Toorberg over three days. Contact them directly for rates.

Where? 38 North Street, Graaff-Reinet

Contact: ☎ 082 925 2309 (Karlien); ✉ toerboer.co.za

Samara Karoo Reserve

They offer special SADC rates, which are really good value for money: from R4 750 per person, which includes all meals, some drinks, two game drives per day and a guided walk in the veld. The accommodation is luxurious.

Samara has three lodges:

The Manor (four suites, each of which sleeps two); Karoo Lodge; and the new luxury tented camp called Plains Camp. Karoo Lodge is currently being renovated and will re-open on 15 December 2023. It will have eight suites including two family units.

Plains Camp is away from the other two lodges, on the Camdeboo Plains. It offers a proper escape – there's no Wi-Fi, just the call of a korhaan at dawn.

Where? Turn off the R63 about 33 km south-east of Graaff-Reinet.

Contact: ✉ samara.co.za

For more things to do, see our 101 Karoo Classics list: p 106 – 107 (Nieu-Bethesda) and p 104 – 105 (Graaff-Reinet). We enjoyed complimentary stays at Samara Karoo Reserve, Khoisan Karoo Conservancy, Toerboer Cottages, Ganora Guest Farm and Colonial Karoo – thank you!

101 Karoo Classics

**Farm stalls • Back roads
Accommodation • Activities**

The Karoo will surprise you around every koppie and prickly pear – it's not just "nothing" out there. We asked some seasoned Karoo travellers for their favourite places to stay, best farm stalls, sneaky back roads and other great things to do while on holiday.

Finding these 101 epic – and often quirky! – things will lead you into the very fibre of the Karoo. And while you're somewhere out there between Rietbron and Aberdeen you'll realise there are 101 more we could have added to the list. Let us know what to include next time!

Use the map on the following page to check where each numbered item is located. Connect the dots and create a road trip...

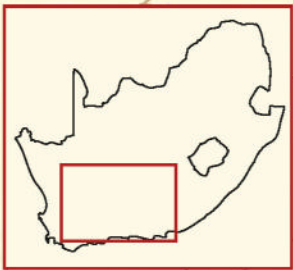
CONTRIBUTORS: Julianne du Toit (pictures by Chris Marais, Karoo Space), Willem van der Berg, Evan Naudé, Sam Reinders, Kyra Tarr & Toast Coetzer





PLEASE NOTE All details, from food and accommodation prices to road conditions, may change unexpectedly. Always contact the relevant person or establishment beforehand to get the latest update. For all mobile numbers listed: If you can't get hold of someone by calling, send a WhatsApp message; many people live in areas where reception is poor or non-existent. A good secondary means of communication is often a direct message on Facebook, where relevant.

THE KAROO



"Hantam" is possibly derived from the Nama word *heyntema*, which refers to the pelargonium plant, or geranium, which grows in the Hantam mountains. It could also originate from !han=ami – which means "mountain where red, edible bulbs grow".

Northern Cape

UPPER KAROO

HARDEMAN'S KAROO

You guessed it; it's not easy to make a living here. It's only for *harde manne!*

In 1774, the Swedish botanist Carl Peter Thunberg named the Roggeveld Plateau after a species of wild rye (*Secale africanum*) – or *wilderog* – that grows there. Due to climate change and overgrazing, the species is critically endangered today.

ROGGEVELD

In older writings Koup is often spelled "Goup" or "Ghoup". It's a Khoekhoe word that refers to the specific fat around an animal's organs. Perhaps when you look out over the plains after good rainfall, the lush Bushman grass surrounding the dark dolerite rocks looks like caul fat around an organ.

KOUP

Locals say the name Moordenaars Karoo has to do with the "murderous" weather conditions – from boiling hot to freezing cold.

MOORDENAARS KAROO

Until the 1700s, this area was known as the Ceres-Karoo. After the proclamation of the Tankwa Karoo National Park in 1986, however, people started referring to it as the Tankwa Karoo. The park was named after the Tankwa River. "Tankwa" has its origins in the Khoekhoe language, and is apparently a variation of "Sanqua" which means "many San".

TANKWA KAROO

LITTLE KAROO

Western Cape

to Cape Town

to Cape Town



101 CLASSICS

LOERIESFONTEIN

1 *Fred Turner Windmill Museum*

The windmill is a part of the Karoo landscape and the Fred Turner Museum pays homage to this icon. (Fred Turner opened the first store in Loeriesfontein in 1895.) The 30 windmills on site were used on farms in the district and elsewhere over the years – you could say they came here to retire!

There's a small church on the premises with exhibitions of historical photos, clothing, equipment and kitchenware. When the original Baptist congregation died out, the church was donated to the municipality for a museum, which finally opened in 1976.

Die Skerm is open during the flower season – a traditional ash bush screen where you can get coffee, tea and *boerekos*.

Opening times: Flower season (August and September): Monday to Saturday from 9 am to 5 pm; Sunday from 10.30 am to 5 pm. Rest of the year only by appointment: Contact Elna Brand on the number below.

Entry fee: Donation.

Address: Lombard Street

Contact: 📞 062 886 4047 (Elna);

📞 027 662 1525 – *Evan Naudé*



DIRK MALAN



CALVINIA

2 *Calvinia Museum*

Ever seen a four-legged ostrich chick? Or a taxidermied sheep that managed to escape the shears for too many years? Human hair fashioned into watch chains and flower wreaths?

The Calvinia Museum, in the town's deconsecrated synagogue, is one of those platteland museums that's full of whimsy, weirdness and interest. It honours the town's former Jewish residents and trekboere, and it's the final resting place of the legendary "Makadas" locomotive that hauled wool produced in the region to the market in distant Port Elizabeth. (Not to be confused with the Makadas train that ran between Laingsburg and Ladismith.) After doing duty from the 1950s to 1977, it was decommissioned and brought to Calvinia.

Entry fee: R10 for adults; R5 for children – larger donations are welcome.

Opening times: Monday to Friday from 8 am to 5 pm; Saturday by arrangement.

Address: 44 Church Street

Contact: 📞 027 341 1043 (Memci van Wyk) – *Julienne du Toit*



3 *Hantam Huise*

Alta and Erwin Coetzee left Gauteng for Calvinia in the late 1980s and they were entranced by the town's old buildings, although many were semi-derelict. Despite the fact that they'd never restored a house in their lives, the Coetzees plunged into the task with passion. It was a steep learning curve but they persisted, always using authentic materials where they could. They harvested poplar wood and recovered old nails from demolished houses. They created floors from clay, straw and horse dung.

Alta and Erwin went on to restore nearly a dozen houses, most of which are open to travellers as the Hantam Huise guesthouses. (Accommodation from about R1 000 per person sharing, but check their website.)

Then there's the Hantam Huis Restaurant, built in 1853. Sit down and have a lamb pie (about R55) for lunch or come for breakfast where there will likely be a *skilpadjie* on the side. Overnight guests can order proper *plaaskos* for dinner: meals like lamb curry, waterblommetjie bredie or bobotie, with veggies and rice (about R200 per person).

Opening times: Hantam Huis Restaurant: weekdays from 7 am to 4.30 pm; Saturdays from 7.30 am to 1 pm.

Address: 42-44 Hoop Street, Calvinia

Contact: ☎ 082 720 1812; 🌐 calvinia.co.za – *Julienne du Toit*

BRANDVLEI

4 *Die Windpomp Restaurant*

As soon as you leave the highways and venture into the Karoo on smaller roads, the well-known chain restaurants disappear. But don't worry – you won't go hungry as long as there are places like Die Windpomp Restaurant in Brandvlei. Their Windpomp burger with chips (R110) fills the entire plate and the patty is pure mutton. They also have breakfast options, pizza and *skaapstertjies* on the menu.

Opening times: Daily from 8 am to 8 pm; Sundays until 2 pm.

Where? Next to the KLK filling station in De Villiers Street (R27).

Contact: ☎ 063 857 0827; "Die Windpomp Restaurant Brandvlei" on Facebook – *Evan Naudé*





WILLISTON

5 The Williston Mall
The Williston Mall is the brainchild of artists Pieter and Elmarie Naudé who bought a bit of property here in 2004, and then added to it, eventually acquiring almost a whole town block. Decades ago, much of this block was a girls' hostel called Die Ark. Some of the bedrooms at what is now Die Ark Guesthouse are named after the old residents, for example, Slopie se Kooi and Lyfie se Katel. (Accommodation from R450 per person sharing; breakfast R100 extra.)

In this capacious space, more attractions popped up to become the Williston Mall: Die Woelpoel (a splash pool), an art studio, the Doppies Bar (overnight guests only) and an eccentric museum and shop selling everything from apricot jam to knitted "Willie Warmers" made by a local *ouma* – no one will say who...

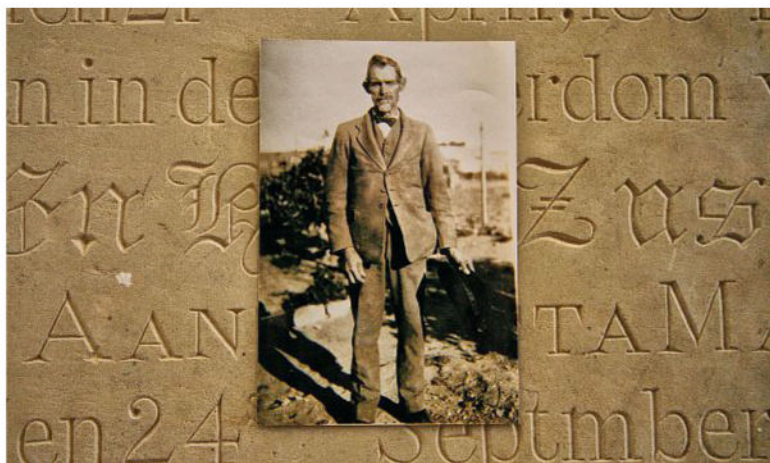
Entry fee: R20 for adults; R10 for children (includes a coffee for the grown-ups) – advance booking essential.

Address: 1-3 Hodgson Street

Contact: ☎ 072 018 7288;

✉ arkgastehuiswilliston@gmail.com;

🌐 willistonmall.co.za – *Julienne du Toit*



6 The Gravestone Route

Years ago, Williston resident Elsa van Schalkwyk discovered a local treasure when a visitor to her guesthouse asked about the grave of a relative. The gravestone, when found, turned out to be made by Cornelius de Waal, a singular man who also once lived in Williston and whose gravestone carvings are true folk art.

As more people became intrigued by this amazing graveyard artist, Elsa found more of his gravestones on farms around the district, and she designed a self-guided route that takes you to them, starting in the Williston cemetery.

Booking is essential if you want a guided tour – you'll either meet Elsa or Cora Steenkamp at the Williston Museum where some of Cornelius de Waal's old tools and stencils are exhibited. The guided tour includes visits to farms like Oest, Koega, Potloer and Brownslaagte, where corbelled houses can also be seen.

Cost: Self-guided tour R50 per person (includes a pamphlet); guided tour R400 per group (half-day excursion); picnic basket R120 per person.

Contact: ☎ 072 074 0912 (Elsa); ☎ 082 463 3927 (Cora) – *Julienne du Toit*



7 Karusaf Karoo meat

Karusaf is a butchery in Williston that sells mutton from the district, which meets the Karoo Meat of Origin standards. Not only do the sheep have to be raised in Karoo veld (where they eat specific *bossies*), farmers may not use growth hormones and have to follow good stockmanship and animal welfare practices. You know you'll get quality meat at Karusaf.

Their shop is opposite the co-op in the main road and their meat is also sold at Manna Restaurant in the same street. Karusaf also delivers in the Cape Town area – visit their website for details.

Opening times: Karusaf is open weekdays from 7 am to 1 pm and from 2 pm to 5 pm. Manna Restaurant is open daily from 7.30 am to 9 pm.

Where? Next to the R63 through Williston.

Contact: 📞 082 389 6309; 🌐 karusaf.co.za

– Willem van der Berg



8 Langbaken Cheese

The Sak River that runs north past Williston eventually sinks into the sands of Bushmanland, never reaching the sea. But it offers just enough to keep fodder and wheatgrass growing at Peter and Francy Schoeman's farm, Langbaken. Peter tends the cattle and Francy has become one of the country's top cheesemakers, producing the best blue cheese you've ever tasted (Karoo Blue), tangy Karoo Crumble, mild Karoobossie, and creamy camembert made of raw milk from cossetted Jersey cows.

The cheeses are available in select delicatessen-type stores around the country, but if you'd like to experience their amazing farm, contact Francy to arrange a special visit to their Tasting Stoepe.

Where? About 35 km east of Williston.

Contact: 📞 082 346 5780;

🌐 langbaken@williston.za.net

– Julienne du Toit

9 Perdekloof circular route

This loop takes you through a scenic section of the Karee Mountains. From Williston, follow the R63 towards Carnarvon. After 10 km, turn left onto a dirt road (the sign says Vanwyksvlei). About 35 km further you'll see a sign for Tuinkloof farm. Continue straight past Tuinkloof and then turn right at every junction ahead. When you're about 20 km from Tuinkloof, you'll see a sign pointing left to Vanwyksvlei – keep right. You'll cross a low-water bridge and the farm Saaipoort on the right. Pull over here and admire the high mountain in front of you to the left. Near the top you'll see a rock column called Maiden Rock.

Now drive 10 km further to the farm Klein Paardekloof. The route goes past it, but if you want to you can turn left and drive 12 km to a quiver tree forest. Then follow the same route back and return to the road you were on.

The road winds through the Karee Mountains. Ignore the turn-offs to the left that want to take you back to the R63 – keep right. The road later runs along a high plateau. Pull over and enjoy the open plains.

When you see the Tuinkloof sign again (55 km from the Klein Paardekloof sign), you can turn left and follow the same road back to Williston. The outing is about 175 km in total without the 24 km to the quiver trees and back. – Willem van der Berg

101 CLASSICS

VERNEUKPAN

10 *Camp on Verneukpan*

It's an almost otherworldly experience to camp on this famous pan. The only sounds you'll hear are the ones you make yourself, like your blood whooshing in your ears.

There are now two farms that offer camping on the pan. The original Verneukpan Campsite is on the eastern side. It has a basic ablution block (you have to stoke a donkey boiler) and a braai screen – during some of my past visits, there was no water and the bathroom wasn't clean. Cost: R150 per person per night.

The newer Verneukpan Wild Camping is on the western side of the pan on the farm Kareeboomdam. It has no facilities – you have to bring your own water, dig your own toilet and leave no trace so the next person can also enjoy the feeling of absolute nothingness. Cost: R75 per person and R200 per vehicle.

Where? Contact each place directly for detailed directions.

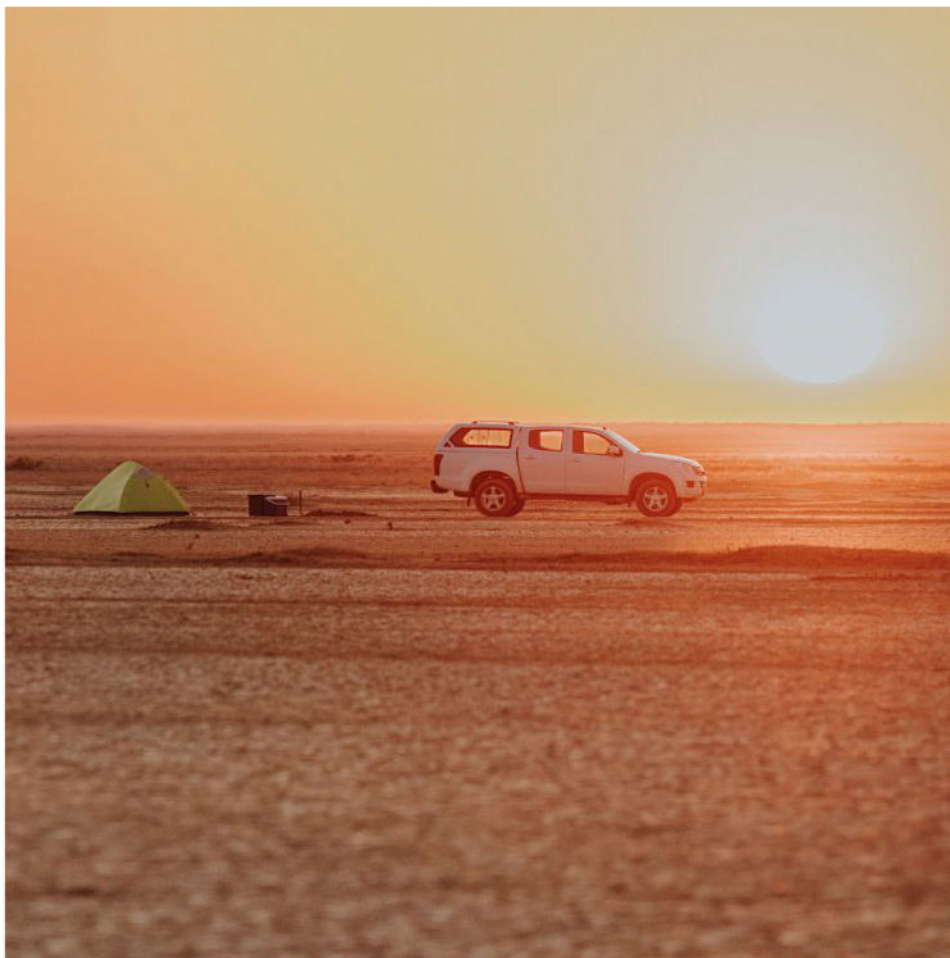
Contact: Verneukpan Campsite

📞 082 921 6714; 📧 verneukpan.co.za

Verneukpan Wild Camping 📞 083 227 2239;

📧 verneukpancamping.co.za

– Willem van der Berg



VANWYKSVLEI

11 *Weg Ry & Sleep Bull Run*

Once a year, a dust cloud hovers over Vanwyksvlei when more than a hundred teams gather for the annual Weg Ry & Sleep Bull Run. The Bull Run is a mix of matric weekend, art festival and motorsport event.

How does it work? You and your teammates, dressed in funny costumes and driving a jalopy, compete in a rally and a series of challenges on a pan outside town. There are prizes and a floating trophy up for grabs, but the Bull Run is all about fun times with friends. Supporters are also welcome – there are stalls selling food, ice and firewood.

When? 3 – 5 October 2023

Cost: R8 700 (📧 quicket.co.za) for a team of two people; extra team members pay R3 000 each. This fee covers your camping stand and entry to the ablution block, as well as a braai pack for each night. Supporters pay R1 575 per person.

Contact: 📧 gerrie@dustmedia.co.za; “Weg Ry & Sleep Bull Run” on Facebook – *Evan Naudé*

CARNARVON

12 *Stuurmansfontein*

After your hosts Piet and Charmaine Botha have welcomed you at this corbelled house, you stay behind in the lovely quiet of the Karoo on your own. Go for a walk in the veld to listen to the crunch of stones under your soles.

Self-catering accommodation costs R1 500 per night for two people; R2 000 for four people and R2 500 for six people. You won't regret ordering a picnic basket – it includes mutton chops, farm sausage, baked potatoes, salad from their garden, and koeksisters from Charmaine's kitchen. It costs R250 per person.

Where? About 57 km west of Carnarvon.

Contact: ☎ 072 352 8070 (Charmaine);

✉ stuurmansfontein@gmail.com

– *Toast Coetzer*



13 *Lord Carnarvon Guesthouse*

Carnarvon is a great overnight stop between Gauteng and the Western Cape if you prefer to travel on quieter roads. Pieter Hoffman has been renovating buildings in Carnarvon and turning them into places to stay for years. He grew up here and knew the people who once lived in the old houses, so he takes extra care with the restoration work. He tries to have their stories live on in the houses. Rates from R550 per person sharing (without breakfast).

You can also have a good meal at Lord's Kitchen Restaurant. They serve dishes like *skaapestertjies* (R110), lamb rib strips (R125) and karoo lamb pizza (R140).

Opening times: Monday to Thursday from 5 pm to 8 pm; Friday to Saturday from 11 am to 8 pm.

Address: 17 Victoria Street (Lord's Kitchen Restaurant)

Contact: ☎ 082 780 4209; "Lord Carnarvon Guesthouse" on Facebook

– *Willem van der Berg*

14 *Three Sons Lamb Co.*

Sarel Cloete farms near Carnarvon and processes his mutton himself in a butchery on the family farm, Driekoppen. The meat (from R160/kg) is certified as organic Karoo mutton and is sold in their shop in Carnarvon.

There are Three Sons Lamb Co. shops in Hermanus, Stellenbosch and Mossel Bay; if you live in Gauteng you can have your meat delivered to your home.

Address: 2 Market Street (near Carnarvon Hotel)

Contact: ✉ threesonslamb.co.za – *Willem van der Berg*





LOXTON

15 *Osfontein Corbelled Cottage*

Corbelled houses were built at a time when rocks were the only available building materials in the Karoo. But don't worry, your hosts Stegmann and Natasha Lubbe have added a few modern-day creature comforts to Osfontein Corbelled Cottage (sleeps five), like a flush toilet and a hot shower. Candles are used for lighting so as not to spoil the atmosphere. It costs R1 100 per night for two people, thereafter R50 per extra person.

The area is great for long walks and mountain biking, and the main farmhouse has a pool if you need to cool off. They also have the Ou Kliphuis and Boomhuis units – same rates apply.

Where? 35 km north-east of Loxton.

Contact: 📞 072 310 7979 (Natasha);

✉️ osfontein@gmail.com

– Sam Reinders

16 *Loxton agricultural show*

In December each year, this small town hosts a proper agricultural show. On the Friday afternoon, rugby is played on the dirt field at the showground. On the Saturday, you can take part in a sack race, tug of war, a strongman competition or a motorcycle race – or you can just watch the action while munching a sosatie.

The main event is the Loxton July, a horse race around the show tracks. After the dust has settled, you can attend the dance and steak braai.

When? 8 – 9 December 2023

Contact: 📞 078 455 6000 (Christo Scholtz); "Loxton Skou" on Facebook – *Willem van der Berg*



17 *Loxton Lekker*

In a town as small as Loxton, a good eatery is worth its weight in gold. Manie and Hester Esterhuizen moved here from Klerksdorp in 2018 and opened Loxton Lekker in 2020. You can have a Groot Loxton breakfast (R85) on the front stoep and watch the farmers pull up at the co-op next door, or hide from the cold inside with a curried mince vetkoek (R40) if there's a winter wind blowing. They also make good coffee (from R20) and carrot cake (R40 per slice).

Opening times: Weekdays from 8 am to 5 pm; Saturdays from 8 am to 1 pm.

Where? Next to the traffic circle around the Dutch Reformed church.

Contact: 📞 079 590 7827 (Hester); "Loxton Lekker" on Facebook

– Toast Coetzer



18 *Bokpoort Road*

From Loxton, follow the R381 south for 600 m and turn left onto the Bokpoort Road as soon as the tar becomes dirt. It's not a road that goes anywhere – except for the lucky owners of farms in the area.

Bokpoort is the name of a poort you'll drive through somewhere along this scenic back road. Slow down to watch the steenbok and their big ears swivel to listen to you pass. Pull over once in a while, switch off your engine and look at the silence sowed among the stones and shrubs. That's why you're here.

When you reach the N12 north of Three Sisters 113 km later, the Karoo will feel like an old friend.

There are a few route options: As soon as you're through Bokpoort, you can head north-east towards Victoria West; elsewhere you have the choice to turn towards Beaufort West. – *Toast Coetzer*



VICTORIA WEST

19 *Victoria West Museum*

Victoria West has fascinating stories and characters. This history was curated over many years by Rochelle Vlok (now retired) in the town museum. A key display is of a rare fossil of a 280-million-year-old fish called *Atherstonia seeleyi* (back then, the Karoo was an inland sea), which was found on the farm Blourug outside town. There's also information about Petrus "Dutch" Hugo, who was born on the farm Pampoenpoort 40 km west of town and went on to become an ace Allied fighter pilot during World War II.

Other must-see items include: Maggie Newman's paintings of Karoo biodiversity; the old town mayoral chain; a starter's pistol used in bicycle races circa 1910; kickboxing trophies; old film projectors; and the church's old hearse, a 1929 Chevrolet.

If you want to explore more heritage, contact retired farmer Theo Olivier. He lives in town and has all the keys to the oldest buildings in Victoria West. He can take you to the Anglican church across the road, where you can see a beautiful stained-glass scene depicting the catastrophic flood of Victoria West in 1871, in which 62 people perished.

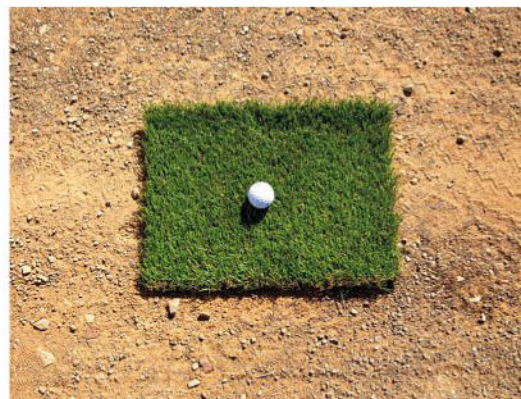
Opening times: Weekdays from 9 am to 4 pm (weekends: contact Theo).

Entry fee: Donation.

Address: 46 Church Street

Contact: 📞 082 852 8618 (Theo)

– *Julienne du Toit*



20 *Play a round of golf!*

At the 18-hole Victoria West course, the fairways are pure veld and your ball might land in a thorn bush or a mole hill! Each player brings their own fairway "mat" made of artificial grass – you're allowed to put your ball on this mat without penalty, prior to *klapping* it further down the course.

The greens consist of compressed sand, solidified by adding old tractor or other machine oil to the surface. To keep them smooth, a heavy tarpaulin is dragged over the greens in a circular motion once your four-ball is done, so it's ready for the next players.

Victoria West's Karoo Classic, held annually in May, attracts about 180 golfers from all over the country. Teams dress up, there's a spit braai and fun is the name of the game.

Cost: R150 per person for a round.

Contact: Hennie van Heerden (club president) 📞 082 303 1009 – *Sam Reinders*



VOSBURG

21 *Die Ketel Coffee Shop & Tuisnywerheid*

The quiet town of Vosburg is next to the R384 between Britstown and Carnarvon. Its tall pine trees cast cool shadows where you can rest for a moment. Die Ketel Coffee Shop & Tuisnywerheid is run by farmers' wives from the area. You won't easily find meals as delicious or affordable elsewhere: Die Ketel breakfast costs R70, a curry tramezzini (my favourite!) is R45, and cheesecake is R30 per slice. Vosburg doesn't have its own butchery but Die Ketel sells packaged cuts like mutton chops (R150/kg).

If you want to stay over, Môrestêr Self-catering Guesthouse is a good bet – rates from R300 per person (☎082 519 7030, 📧morestervosburg.com).

Opening times: Die Ketel is open on weekdays from 9 am to 4 pm; Saturdays from 9 am to noon (in summer they open at 8 am).

Address: 33 Market Street

Contact: ☎072 997 3182 (Elsabé Janse van Rensburg) – *Willem van der Berg*

RICHMOND

23 *Richmond Horse Museum*

Apparently there are only two museums dedicated to the saddle horse in the world: One is in Kentucky, USA, and the other is in Richmond in the Northern Cape. Exhibits include a horse-drawn communion wagon (pictured, top right), ancient muzzleloaders and items of clothing that kept carriage men warm on long, cold drives through the veld.

The museum also contains bits of heritage from the town. There's a 1949 map of the old railway lines, marked with every station and siding in the land. There's even a wooden hand that once belonged to a man called Doel Kok, who was wounded in an Anglo-Boer War skirmish on the bridge over the Ongers River.

Johan Tolken is the devoted curator. (And the local ghost tour guide. . .) Your donation includes access to Johan's private museum next door. Here, you can see anything from a model of a British ship that used to transport horses around the world, gravestones, a whale vertebra – and old Spur menus. On the wall is a valve radio that can still pick up RSG when the wind blows just right.

Opening times: Weekdays from 8.30 am to noon and 2 pm to 4.30 pm; Saturdays until noon.

Entrance fee: Donation.

Address: Corner of Loop Street and Daggabult.

Contact: ☎072 629 0742 (Johan);

📧richmondnc.co.za – *Julienne du Toit*



BRITSTOWN

22 *Kambro Farm Stall*

Travellers have been stopping at this popular farm stall next to the N12 for 31 years. The secret to its success is that people never have to wonder whether it's open! It's always open – "Kambro is only closed on Christmas Day," says owner Wilma Strauss.

The farm stall is known for its pies: A chicken or springbok pie (pictured) with chips and salad costs R70; a mutton pie is R78. The lamb curry (R150) is also popular.

They also offer accommodation – the latest addition is the Hoodia Gordonii bush camp (R250 per person) some distance into the veld. Chalets from R300 per person; camping from R130 per person. (The bathroom is definitely one of the neatest I've encountered in a campsite.) Dinner is available for overnight guests.

Opening times: Daily from 7 am to 6 pm.

Where? About 20km north of Britstown, next to the N12.

Contact: ☎083 800 0014; 📧kambroaccom.co.za – *Willem van der Berg*



24 Richmond Trading Post

At the Richmond Trading Post (Antiques and Collectibles) you can buy just about anything. On a recent visit I saw a crate of old hinges, a warthog tusk, a random cricket captain's jacket, a well-used ashtray, Panorama magazines from the 1950s, old bottles aplenty, and most of CJ Langenhoven's *Versamelde Werke*. It's instantly overwhelming and at the same time calmly satisfying.

Owner Ian Smit (pictured, above) describes the contents of his shop – a retirement venture and hobby that “got out of hand” – as “kakkies en bakkies”. But, of course, it's way more than that. Also, if you're into Anglo-Boer War regalia, Ian is your man.

Opening times: Weekdays from 9 am to 5 pm; Saturday from 9 am to 1 pm.

Address: Loop Street

Contact: 082 797 2018 (Ian); “Richmond Trading Post” on Facebook – *Sam Reinders*



25 Karoo Padstal

Snuggled against a koppie next to the N1 between Richmond and Hanover is a white-painted building that started life as a sheep-shearing shed. Owned by Nicol and Klaradyn Grobler, Karoo Padstal is no ordinary farm stall. Thanks to baker Simon Renoster and barista Portia Ramantsane, the farm stall smells of freshly roasted coffee and heavenly pastry when the doors open at 8 am.

The chocolate chip cookies, ginger biscuits and rusks (from R95 to R115 per pack) are made with real butter. The eggs used for baking are laid by the farm stall's own chickens wandering around outside.

You can order quiches with bacon, cheese grillers, green figs or biltong (R45 – R65 per serving), or lamb and venison pies (R45 each). There's fresh roosterkoek with different fillings – prices from R35 to R95.

There are spectacular chandeliers for sale (made by Mud Studio in Port Alfred); the dearest wooden birdhouses; *draadkarretjies*; Beatrix Potter-esque tea cosies knitted by Anita Schaap (a newcomer to Richmond; serious knitter and a doctor of economics); and craft gins and fine wines from unusual places like Lowerland, an organic farm near Prieska.

Opening times: Monday to Saturday from 9 am to 4 pm (and on Sunday during December only).

Where? 21 km north of Richmond along the N1.

Contact: 081 219 2860; karoopadstal@gmail.com; “Karoo Padstal” on Facebook – *Julienne du Toit*

PHILIPPOLIS

26 Groenhuis

In 2020, journalist Jens Friis made a snap decision to head to his home town of Philippolis to spend what he and his partner Niel de Leeuw fondly imagined might be a few weeks of lockdown.

By the end of the year, Niel and Jens had changed their lives, turned their backs on Johannesburg and decided to stay in Philippolis. Groenhuis had been run as a guesthouse by Jens's father (also Jens) but since he had just retired, Jens Jr took over. Groenhuis has since morphed into seven beautifully restored houses. Rates from R650 per person sharing, all self-catering. Discounts for longer stays – they're also pet-friendly!

Address: 11 Koksfontein Street

Contact: 084 581 0149 (Jens); vrystaatkaroo@gmail.com; philippolis.co.za

– *Julienne du Toit*





27 Philippolis Uber

Tanya Kriel moved to Philippolis from Hopetown in 2020. She moved in with 18 horses and 13 chickens, *plus* an assortment of dogs and cats.

Hitching a ride on one of her horse-drawn carts is a great way to experience the town. On the hour-long “Philippolis Uber” outing, you clop slowly down story-filled Tobie Muller Street. Look out for the Anglican church that was turned into a home, the old Jewish *smouswinkel* that’s now a butchery, and Adam Kok’s Griqua Raadsaal. His cannons are still there, commanding the view over the main road.

Everyone knows Tanya by now. Sometimes when she has to speed up a horse for momentum over a hillock, the locals will cheer: “Gooi clutch, gooi clutch!”

Cost: R100 per person.

Contact: 📞 079 511 6752 (Tanya) – *Julienne du Toit*

28 Waterkloof Karoo Ale Brewery

Just outside Philippolis is a ghost town called Waterkloof, abandoned for decades. Yet it has a craft brewery, run by a former horse judge called Pierre Jacobs and his wife Corrie. It was the availability of sweet water that brought them to Waterkloof – Pierre figured the water might brew into pretty fine beer. Pop in for a taster of Karoo Ale and take a six-pack home (R300; 440 ml bottles). They also have a lager (R180 for a six-pack; 330 ml bottles).

Once a month, usually on the first Saturday, there’s a slow and lekker market called The Boot Sale, hosted at the brewery. It is attended by locals who make food and sell whatever they have, from honey to crafts. Expect curry and rice alongside *kerrieafval*, pancakes, beer and more beer (also gin and wine).

Opening times: Monday to Saturday from 10 am to 6 pm.

Where? 5 km south of Philippolis along the R717.

Contact: 📞 084 643 0602 (Pierre); 📧 pijacobs4351@gmail.com; “Karoo Ale Craft Beer” on Facebook – *Julienne du Toit*



COLESBERG

29 Zen Buddhist Retreats

Zen Buddhism and Karoo tranquillity are the perfect match and you can experience both at a week-long silent retreat with Antony and Margie Osler, on the farm Poplar Grove. Loosen the tight fist of the mind and find peace. The centre of the Formal Zen and Veld Zen retreats is the Zendo, a former sheep shed turned into a place of meditation.

For those not used to the effects of sitting silently, Antony explains: “Zen means meditation; meditation means to wake up. Waking up means to open your eyes, your ears and your whole being. *Then* you can connect with the world you live in – you can dance with it, weep with it, fight with it and heal it.”

Where? About 32 km south of Colesberg.

Contact: 📧 stoepzen.co.za – *Julienne du Toit*



MIDDELBURG

30 *Schoombee Karoo Plaasstal*

This stylish shop is in the middle of Middelburg, selling delicious baked goods and assorted offerings from the Karoo, including frozen lamb. Don't leave without a bottle of their famous pomegranate cordial (R59 for a 500 ml), which comes from an orchard on the farm Vriesfontein owned by Dionne and Deon Schoombee.

Dionne's parents, Pierre and Charma van Vuuren, ran a hunting business for many years. Since most trophy hunters usually leave everything behind but the head, they started making venison and bobotie pies (R25 each) from the meat, and their flagship product, kudu salami (R250 for 1,2 kg).

Opening times: Weekdays from 8.30 am to 5 pm; Saturdays from 9 am to 1 pm.

Address: 57 Meintjies Street (next to Sasol)

Contact: 076 824 6650;

📧 schoombeekaroooplaasstal@gmail.com;

"Schoombee Karoo Plaasstal" on Facebook

– *Julienne du Toit*



31 *Karoo Winter Wool Festival*

The Karoo Winter Wool Festival gathers an extraordinary collection of farmers, weavers, dyers, makers and businesses working with South African wool, for a weekend of education, celebration and downright fun.

The festival HQ is Dwarsvlei Farm (see #32), where a sprawling market is set up. (Wool clothing, rugs, slippers, yarn, needles...) Women sit and knit while kids squeal on a jumping castle and droves of people head for a hot *moerkoffie*.

There's more: The fit and healthy can sign up for trail runs or adventure cycle races on Beskuitfontein; and the Moolman farm on the other side of town hosts a *skuurdans* of note on the Friday night. You can also join a variety of workshops (dyeing, felting, weaving) and watch a sheepdog demonstration or sheep-shearing session.

When? June 2024 – keep an eye on the website for a date announcement.

Contact: 📧 karoowinterwoolfestival.com – *Sam Reinders*

32 *Dwarsvlei Karoo Guest Farm*

The stately farmstead on Dwarsvlei – and the network of stables around it – was built in 1910 by a randlord named Henry Nourse. For a while, this was one of the largest thoroughbred horse studs in the world (more than 700 horses spread over several farms). Over the decades, the unused stables and other buildings fell into disrepair. Dwarsvlei eventually became a guesthouse, and the land was farmed by the Van Lingen family from 1963.

When Sarah and Matthew van Lingen married here in 2019, amid garden roses and green poplar groves, they vowed to revive place. Now it regularly fills up with trail runners, hikers and cyclists who come for the popular Run the Karoo and Ride the Karoo challenges. The barns and old stables have been turned into event venues and accommodation.

Accommodation from R550 per person sharing (or R620 with breakfast) in a standard room at the main house; the basic Stable units are R200 per person. There's also the Wild Olive Mountain Cottage (sleeps six max with two kids on sleeper couches), which costs R1 000 per night. Camping R250 per site (max six people).

Where? 15 km south of Middelburg, off the N9.

Contact: 066 220 2218; 📧 dwarsvlei.co.za – *Julienne du Toit*



101 CLASSICS



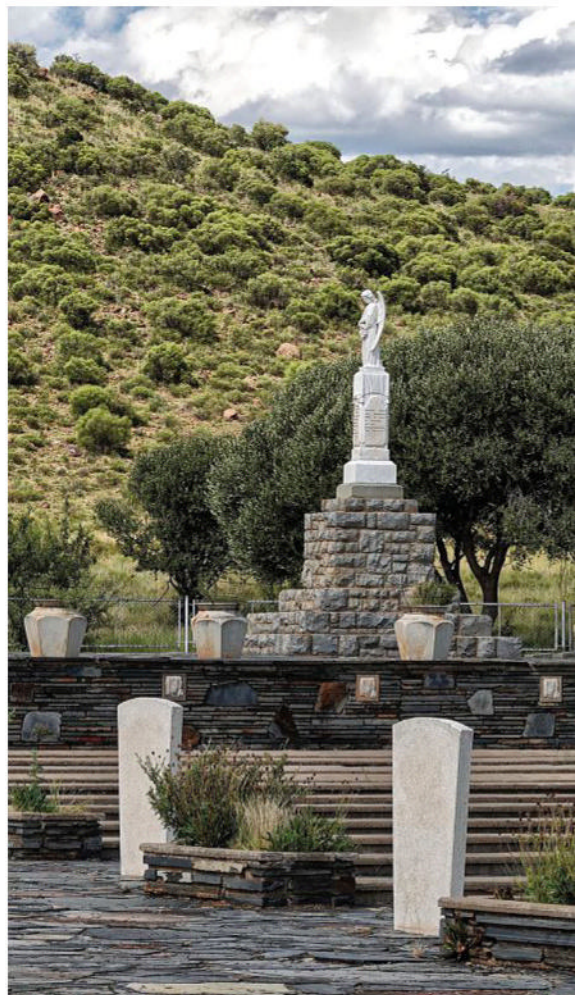
33 *The Rabbit Hole Karoo Venue*

Chef Adrienne Southey was looking for a venue for her farm cooking classes when her eye fell on a forgotten shed once used for an experiment with rabbit farming on their family farm, Hillston. She put out a call for broken or unwanted tiles on Facebook, thinking she might cover a few sections of the floor with mosaic, and she was blown away by the response. Pink, blue, green, glittery and terracotta tiles arrived from Cradock, Noupoot and even further afield, and she put them to good use. And so, the shed became a venue for cooking classes, Mother's Day lunches and weddings.

There are two cottages on Hillston. Accommodation (R350 per person) is self-catering, but you can also book breakfast (R120 per person) and dinner (R250 per person).

Where? Along the R56 between Steynsburg (47 km) and Middelburg (54 km). Take the Oorlogspoort dirt road – Hillston is 5 km in.

Contact: 📞 082 449 3348 (Adrienne); ✉️ adsouthey@gmail.com; 🌐 hillstonfarm.co.za; "Rabbit Hole Karoo Venue" on Facebook – *Julienne du Toit*



GARIEP

34 *Gariep Dam*

Turn off to Gariep Dam and take a breather next to the biggest dam in the country, completed in 1971. You can drive across the dam wall – it's almost a kilometre long and 88 metres high. With a little effort, you can also explore the inside of the dam wall (you'll have to climb lots of steps!) with an official from the Water Affairs office. (Call 📞 051 754 0001 and ask to do the dam wall tour – they'll e-mail you a form to fill in. It takes a week to get approval, but the tour is free.)

If you want to enjoy the dam from the water, book a spot with Gariep Boat Cruises (📞 051 754 0190; R160 per person – minimum eight people). There's a bar on board and it's the perfect place to have sundowners.

There are lots of places to stay next to the water. The rooms at De Stijl Gariep Hotel have some of the best views of the dam (from R1 000 per person). At the popular Forever Resort Gariep you can stay in chalets (from R320 per person) or in the campsite (R130 per person).

Contact: De Stijl 📞 051 754 0060; 🌐 destijl.co.za; Forever Resort Gariep 📞 051 754 0045; 🌐 forevergariep.co.za – *Willem van der Berg*



BETHULIE

35 *Anglo-Boer War history*

This old Free State town is full of Anglo-Boer War history. Kamp Kerkhof is the last resting place of most of the 1 737 men, women and children who died in Bethulie's concentration camp. Take note of the memorials to children, many of them etched by hand into sandstone headstones. These were rescued from the rising waters after the nearby Gariep Dam was built, and included here, built into walls.

Trudie Venter of the Pellissier House Museum can give you a guided tour of the site. This museum is situated in a gracious old building that was once the home of Jean Pierre Pellissier of the Paris Missionary Society. You can see his original Bible and desk, which dates back to 1830. There are also Boer War and concentration camp artefacts. The museum is open by appointment only – send a WhatsApp to Trudie. Entry to the museum and guided tours to Kamp Kerkhof are free, but she asks for a donation towards the upkeep of the museum. "Anything from R5 to R5 million is fine!" she says with a laugh.

Check out the website karoobattlefields.com for more info about Bethulie's involvement in the Anglo-Boer War, as well as other key towns in the area: Colesberg, Noupoort and Norvalspont.

Where? Kamp Kerkhof: Driving from the south, the R390 skirts Bethulie and you'll see Kamp Kerkhof on your right before the T-junction with the R701. Pellissier Museum is at 1 Voortrekker Street.

Contact: ☎ 083 630 8849 (Trudie); 📧 bethulietourism.co.za – *Julienne du Toit*



36 *The Book Hotel*

Otherwise known as the Royal Hotel, this unusual hostelry in the middle of Bethulie was established 150 years ago. Like Royal Hotels all over the country, it has gone through ups and downs, and nearly became a row of shops before being bought on impulse by the writer and book collector Anthony Hocking.

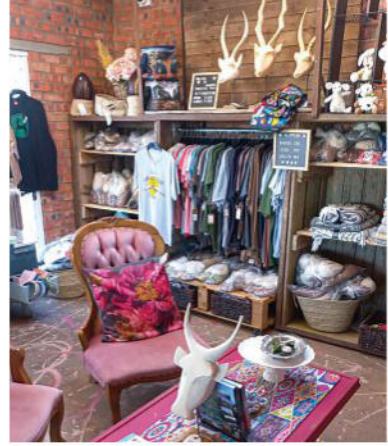
There's nothing in the way of exterior signage, but inside is another world – one of books and vinyl LPs by the tens of thousands.

The hotel rooms (from R560 per person sharing, with breakfast) are unfussy and comfortable, the staff are friendly and efficient, there's home-cooked food, and you have Anthony's considerable storytelling talents on tap. This truly is The House of Stories.

Anthony also offers town and Anglo-Boer War history tours for guests: R650 for a group of six; rate negotiable thereafter.

Address: 22 Voortrekker Street

Contact: ☎ 071 683 7767 (Anthony); 📧 info@royalbethulie.co.za – *Julienne du Toit*



VENTERSTAD

37 *Willem se Kampie Padstal*

For years, Annette Steyn worked in Parliament as the DA spokesperson on agriculture. She resigned in 2022 and returned to the farm.

"Within two months I was bored out of my mind," she says. "I couldn't sit around and do nothing!"

So, she and her friend Corlia van Wyk opened Willem se Kampie, named after Annette's late father-in-law, Willem Steyn. It's a farm stall that sells everything from toy guns and wool beanies to biscuits and farm butter all the way from Cookhouse. You can sit inside or outside on the stoep – or even on a deck overlooking the Gariep Dam. I bought delicious pancakes (R8 each), but you can also sit down for roosterkoek with kudu meat (R70), bacon and eggs (R60) or mutton (R70). Keep things simple and order pap, sausage and sauce for only R65. If you have a sweet tooth, you can order a slice of milk tart (R25) with your coffee (from R30).

Opening times: Daily from 8 am to 4 pm (they close earlier on Saturdays and Sundays).

Where? 5 km west of Venterstad next to the R58.

Contact: ☎ 082 578 7466 (Annette); "Willem se Kampie Padstal Venterstad" on Facebook – *Toast Coetzer*

TANKWA KAROO

38 *Tankwa Padstal*

Anyone who has ever driven to AfrikaBurn or the Tankwa Karoo National Park will know this place. This farm stall is next to the R355, which is notorious for its sharp shale stones that have caused many a flat tyre.

Owners Hein and Susan Lange stock everything a traveller (4x4 driver, cyclist or donkey-cart driver) might need: pipe cleaners, safety pins, tyre repair kits, Vastrap fly ribbons, rooibos tea, umbrellas, shoelaces, honeybush espresso, leg warmers, body art paint, pots, hobby knives, Rizla, medicated snuff, matches, violin and banjo strings, chilli relishes of varying strengths, and perhaps even quail eggs.

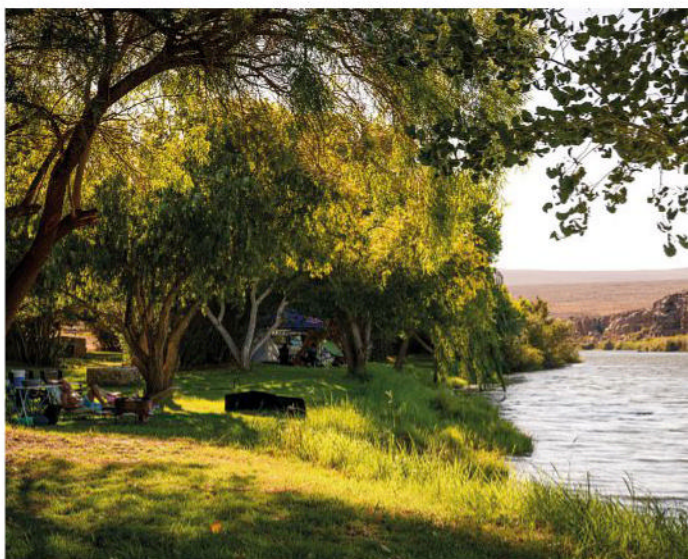
There is a community hall, a library for local farmworkers, and they run other upliftment projects, too – donations are welcome.

Opening times: Daily except Wednesday from 9 am to 5 pm.

Where? 89 km north of Ceres; 168 km south of Calvinia, next to the R355.

Contact: 📞 078 606 7366; 📞 078 365 2441; ✉️ hlange@breede.co.za;

🌐 tankwapadstal-tourism.co.za – *Julienne du Toit*



39 *Die Mond Campsite*

No one will believe you when you say you camped on a lush lawn under a willow tree next to a river in the Tankwa. . . With the Groot River running through, Die Mond really is an oasis in this arid landscape. Bring your kayaks, frisbees, bicycles and fishing rods!

At the campsite (R150 per person) you can pick your own stand along the 200 m riverbank. There are braai drums (bring your own grid) and ablutions with hot water and washing-up facilities, but no power points. There are also seven self-catering units (from R550 per night) if you'd rather sleep in a bed. Ice, firewood and braai packs for sale.

Where? About 45 km north-west of the Tankwa Padstal – turn left off the R355.

Contact: 📞 023 317 0668; 📞 073 812 6638;

✉️ diemond@breede.net; "Die Mond" on Facebook – *Evan Naudé*



40 *AfrikaBurn*

AfrikaBurn is a week-long event with art and music, and also an experiment in building a temporary community in the desert. Every year, a tented city called Tankwa Town is erected with things like a radio station, an airport (yes, you can fly in. . .), a cinema, library and coffee shops.

You can't buy anything except ice – all other goods are acquired through a gifting system. For example, your coffee is free as long as you contribute a gift like some rusks, a toffee apple or a book.

Huge art installations are built on the festival grounds and set alight one by one during the week – it's an awesome sight!

You have to drive a long dirt road to get to Tankwa Town and you have to be self-sufficient. It's challenging, but a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

When? 29 April to 5 May 2024

Where? On the farm Quaggafontein, between the Tankwa Padstal and the national park.

Contact: ✉️ afrikaburn.org – *Evan Naudé*

41 Tankwa Karoo National Park

When you want to get away from the hustle and bustle, few places are as remote as the Tankwa Karoo National Park. Roodewerf, the park's headquarters, is about 50 km from Middelpos, 140 km from Sutherland, 180 km from Ceres and 110 km from Calvinia – this is not the kind of place where you can hop in your car to quickly go buy something!

The park was established in 1986 using eight state farms; more land has been added over the years. It's now about 1 460 km² in size – more than enough space for mountain zebra, red hartebeest, gemsbok, springbok and eland to roam. Bring your binos so you can scan the plains.

All the roads are dirt, as are all the access roads. Drive a vehicle with a high ground clearance.

You can overnight in a self-catering farmhouse or cottage (from R1 530 per night for four people); or pitch your tent in one of two campsites or in a bush camp with no facilities (from R170 per night for two people).

Conservation fee: R52 per adult; R26 per child under 12; free with a Wild card.

Contact: ☎ 012 428 9111 (bookings); 🌐 sanparks.org – *Evan Naudé*



MIDDELPOS

42 Middelpos

This tiny village is next to the R354 dirt road, about halfway between Sutherland and Calvinia. Helena and Koos van der Westhuizen, also known for the boerbulls they breed, have owned the Middelpos Hotel and Die Winkel (it's the *only* shop...) for many years.

Your groceries won't be scanned in Die Winkel – the cash register is still on one of those old wooden display cases where loose sweets are kept behind the glass.

Accommodation at the hotel starts at R600 per person (weekdays), with breakfast and dinner included. They also have a self-catering house that sleeps seven people: R2 200 per night.

Middelpos Diensstasie was the only filling station in the area for many years, but it recently closed down and is for sale if you're up for a challenge. The tyre repair service, Wiel en Siel, is still open. If you have tyre trouble, contact Madelein Bothma on ☎ 073 260 5305.

The annual bazaar in September (30 September this year) is a big party.

Contact: ☎ 079 342 1035; "Middelpos Hotel-Tankwa" on Facebook – *Willem van der Berg*

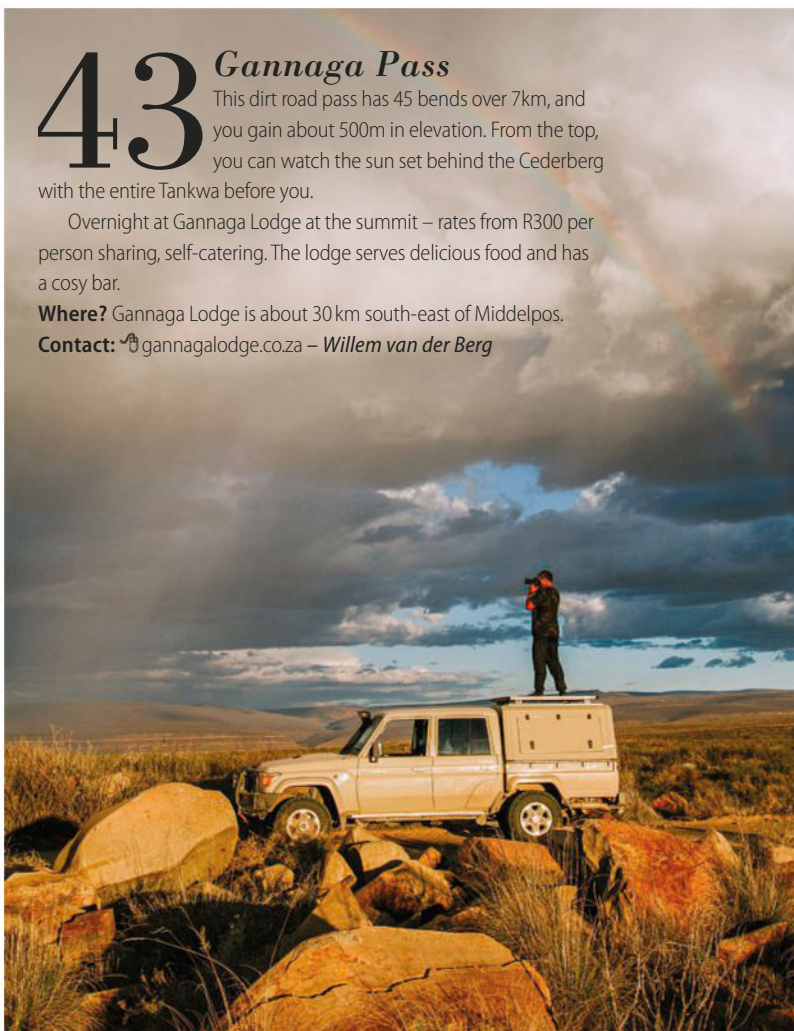
43 Gannaga Pass

This dirt road pass has 45 bends over 7km, and you gain about 500m in elevation. From the top, you can watch the sun set behind the Cederberg with the entire Tankwa before you.

Overnight at Gannaga Lodge at the summit – rates from R300 per person sharing, self-catering. The lodge serves delicious food and has a cosy bar.

Where? Gannaga Lodge is about 30 km south-east of Middelpos.

Contact: 🌐 gannagalodge.co.za – *Willem van der Berg*





SUTHERLAND

44 *Sterland*

Sterland is the most popular stargazing spot in Sutherland because owner Jurg Wagener is so passionate about the night sky. During a 90-minute session (R200 per adult; R100 per child), with heaps of humour and six telescopes, he'll teach you how to find the Southern Cross, which stars are in Orion's Belt, what Magellanic clouds are and many other celestial facts.

You can stargaze all year-round except when it's overcast; times differ depending on the season.

Sterland has a caravan park (R200 per person) and Jurg also runs a few self-catering houses in town (from R500 per person sharing).

Where? At the southern end of Sutherland.

Contact: ☎ 082 556 9589 (Jurg); 📧 sutherlandinfo.co.za

– Evan Naudé



46 *Rante road*

The Rante road between Sutherland and Fraserburg winds through the Nuweveld Mountains. You won't see many other vehicles or people along the way, but you're guaranteed tranquil views where you can pour yourself a cup of flask coffee and have a think.

From Sutherland, follow the R356 to Fraserburg for about 25 km and turn right where the sign reads "Rante AP 2259". The Rante road runs roughly parallel to the R356 and joins up with it again near Fraserburg. It's also a great road to cycle. – Willem van der Berg

45 *Ouberg Pass*

Ouberg Pass has crazy slopes and nerve-wracking corners – it was built by farmers many years ago so they could trek their sheep from summer grazing on the Roggeveld Plateau to winter grazing pastures down in the Tankwa.

The top of the pass is 1400 m above sea level; the bottom is 675 m.

Where? About 45 km west of Sutherland. – Willem van der Berg



MATJIESFONTEIN

47 *Lord Milner Hotel*

Matjiesfontein is located where it is because a railway line was built here to take man and his modern things deeper into the interior. In 1899, James Logan built the Milner Hotel – the name was changed to the Lord Milner Hotel in 1970 when David Rawdon bought most of the village.

Rawdon was forward-thinking and preserved the historical buildings of Matjiesfontein. You can overnight at the Lord Milner for from R1 950 per night for two people, with breakfast. (Rooms in The Mews from R1 150 per night for two people.) Book a few days here and have a holiday – you can relax in the garden behind the hotel, where there's a big swimming pool in the shade of bluegum trees.

If you just want to drop by for coffee and cake, head to the Coffee House down the street. You can also visit the Transport Museum (vintage cars, bicycles etc.), the Marie Rawdon Museum (antiques from the pioneer years) or the Railway Museum. Entry costs R10 per person at each museum.

Where? Next to the N1, 236 km from Cape Town.

Contact: ☎ 023 561 3011; 🌐 matjiesfontein.com

– *Toast Coetzer*



LAINGSBURG

48 *Pigeon liberation*

It's the early hours of the morning, and the trucks arrived in Laingsburg last night, having driven from cities like Cape Town, Joburg and Durban. Their cargo? Homing pigeons. As the sun rises, the pigeons are liberated. In a fast, fluttery, beautiful moment, the birds are released.

It's over quickly but the event makes for fantastic photographs. The pigeons swirl for a moment, then ascend in a rotating column looking a little lost in the barren landscape, and then, seemingly as one, their homing instincts kick in and they set off.

Click the "Race Program" tab on the website of the Federated Board of Homing Unions (FBHU) to see when races happen and where the liberation point is. Other Karoo towns are also used, like Leeu-Gamka, Vosburg, Victoria West and Calvinia.

When? Saturday mornings from end May to middle September.

Contact: 🌐 fbhusecretary@gmail.com;

🌐 fbhu.org.za – *Sam Reinders*





MERWEVILLE

49 *Sunset koppie*

Merweville is a nice quiet, clean town to explore on foot. Plan your stroll so that you end at the koppie behind the Dutch Reformed church just before sundown. The view is vast and you'll glow along with the landscape in the last light. – *Willem van der Berg*



50 *Douvoordag Slagtery*

This small butchery is owned by Joubert and Marian Esterhuizen – they sell mutton under the brand name Koup Lamb. (This part of the Karoo is known as the Koup.) In the winter months, they also have delicious venison pies (R30) and different kinds of sausage. They always have chicken and mutton pies (R30 each). You can buy beef “bacon” (R169,50/kg), beef salami (R155,95/kg) and fresh milk. If you're lucky, you'll arrive when they've just baked ciabatta...

Opening times: Monday to Friday from 7 am to 5 pm (closed 1 – 2 pm); Saturday from 9 am to 1 pm.

Address: 134 Hugenoot Street

Contact: ☎ 023 501 4117; 📧 douvoordagslagter@gmail.com; “Douvoordag Slagtery” on Facebook

– *Willem van der Berg*

51 *Rammelkop Pass*

This dirt pass over the Nuweveld Mountains between Merweville and Sutherland (108 km) is a fun adventure. You don't need a 4x4 but a vehicle with high clearance is recommended. Start in Merweville and you'll cross several dry riverbeds before you reach the pass itself. From the top, the road winds through a few farm gates and past beautiful farmsteads with historic corbelled houses.

– *Willem van der Berg*



FRASERBURG

52

Fossil tracks

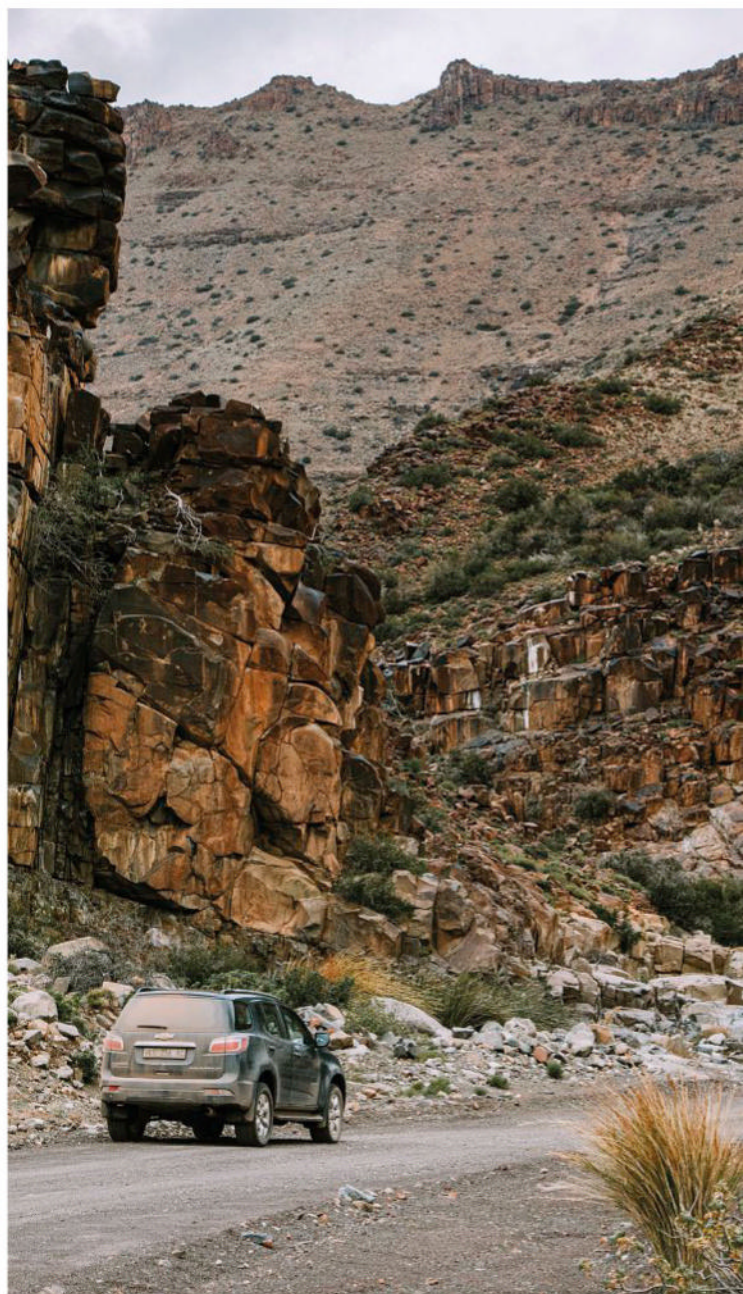
The Karoo has many fossil treasures, but the tracks on the farm Gansfontein, about 4 km outside Fraserburg, are really something to see. At first glance it looks like a hippo or rhino stepped in wet mud, but the tracks were actually left by a five-toed reptilian ancestor of modern mammals – the plant-eating *Bradysaurus*. You can also see tracks of the meat-eating *Anteosaurus* (pictured, above). Both are part of the group of animals known as *Dinocephalia*.

Marinda Oberholzer, a retired police officer with an interest in palaeontology, offers a 2½ hour tour to Gansfontein. Book beforehand and meet her at the Ou Pastorie Museum.

Aside from the fossil tracks, you can also see preserved water ripples and the marks left by crawling insects and snails. The tour ends at the Gansfontein farmstead where you can have cooldrink, tea or coffee and look at a fossil exhibition. Marinda also offers a separate tour (45 minutes, donation only) where you can learn more about the history of Fraserburg.

Cost: R200 per adult; R120 per child under 12 (discounts for bigger groups).

Contact: ☎ 072 386 0102 (Marinda); ✉ marinda.karoofossilstours@gmail.com; “Karoo Fossil Tours” on Facebook – *Toast Coetzer*



53

Oukloof Pass

About 10 km south of Beaufort West on the N1, a dirt road turns off to the right. (Look for the “Fraserburg” sign.) This route is about 130 km in total and takes you through Oukloof Pass.

One winter’s night in 2015, Sylvester the lion escaped from the Karoo National Park near here. And when you drive the pass (actually more of a poort) you’ll understand why: Big kudu bulls and agile klipspringers stir against the slopes if you look closely... – *Willem van der Berg*



PRINCE ALBERT

54 Pancakes! Every Saturday morning, visitors and residents congregate at the Prince Albert Karoo Market (or just the “Saterdag Markie”). Although there are plenty of food and fresh-produce stalls (breakfast buns, jaffles, smoothies, home-made pies, figs and olives from local farms), people come from far and wide for one (or ten...) of Marie and Johan du Toit’s famous pancakes. Johan flipped, and Marie rolled, their first pancake in March 2002. Then, they cost R1,50 and they sold about 50 each weekend. Fast forward to 2023, they’re R5 each and they’ve sold more than a quarter of a million!

You can choose between two kinds: an “Engelse” pancake with cinnamon sugar and lemon juice; or an “Afrikaanse” without the lemon juice.

What started out as a side project to help put their kids through school and university has become a cinnamon-dusted juggernaut. Their kids have long since flown the coop; Johan jokes that the money is now for retirement. The only problem is they can’t take a weekend off, never mind retire, because the locals can’t live without their fix!

When? Saturdays from 9am to noon.

Where? In the centre of town along the main road, next to the Fransie Pienaar Museum.

Contact: Prince Albert Tourism ☎ 023 54 11 366; “Prince Albert Market” on Facebook

– Sam Reinders



55 Witblits When the first farmers made their way from the Cape to the Prince Albert area around 1762, they brought their pot stills and knowledge of making witblits. Witblits is a clear brandy made from grapes – hanepoot grapes in this case, sourced from the nearby Little Karoo.

In 1985, the Fransie Pienaar Museum built a copper still and during March and April every year, a team of dedicated locals meets to keep the tradition alive. For a few days they stoke the fire that heats the still and carefully watch as each drop flows down a cooled coil tube before dripping out of the tap fitted with a lemon leaf (for flavour).

The witblits is for sale at the museum for R200 (375 ml). Quantities are always very limited.

While you’re there, take a peek at the exhibition about the life and art of Outa Lappies (Jan Schoeman), one of the town’s most famous residents. He passed away in 2011 but his legacy of “*maak iets van niks*” lives on.

Opening times: Weekdays from 8am to 6pm; Saturdays from 9.30am to noon; Sundays from 10.30am to 11.30am.

Entry fee: R20 per adult; R10 per child.

Address: 42 Church Street

Contact: 📧 fransiepemuseum@lantic.net; 🌐 princealbert.org.za – Sam Reinders

56 Sunset on the Skapieseinde Road “See you on the Skapieseinde Road later,” is Prince Albert code for: “See you at one of the best sunset spots in the Karoo.”

Pack your cooler box and a camping chair and follow that local if you can. From the main road in town, turn west into Magrieta Prinsloo Road and go past the industrial area where there was once an abattoir, hence the name Skapieseinde...

It soon feels as if you are in the middle of nowhere. At the 5 km mark there’s a white beacon, which is a popular meeting spot (pictured, right).

The mighty Swartberg will turn a perfect pink before the sun dips away. Those two mountains on the horizon that look like Stegosauruses are called the Trapsuutjies Mountains. No need to rush home after the sun has set. A blanket on the ground is all you need to experience the Karoo sky and its shooting stars. – Sam Reinders

57 *Swartberg 100*

The Karoo isn't all *stoepsit* and horizontal star watching – it's also a place for endurance

athletes. The Swartberg 100 is a Gran Fondo (sounds like a fancy cheese but is actually Italian for something like “Big Ride” or “Big Challenge”) and part of a world circuit of such events. Hundreds of cyclists pit their modern bikes against an old foe: a gnarly stretch of road.

The Swartberg 100 is 170 km long and starts and finishes in Prince Albert. Along the way you ride through Meiringspoort and back over the entire Swartberg Pass... It's not for the faint of heart! There are also shorter routes for the *stoepsitters* among us: the Medio Fondo (75 km); a relay version; and even an e-bike version.

When? Usually late in April – see the website for the 2024 date announcement.

Contact: 📞 [swartberg100.com](https://www.swartberg100.com) – Sam Reinders



58 *Swartberg Pass*

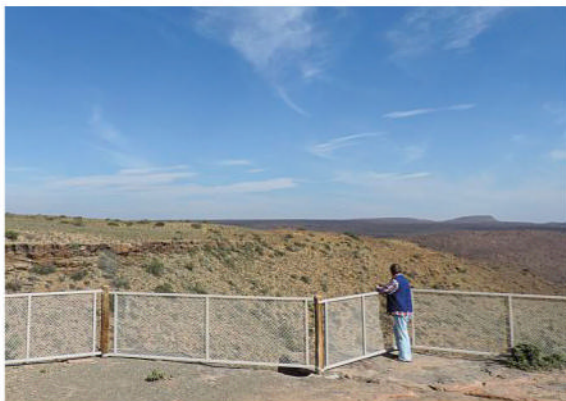
One of South Africa's most iconic gravel passes, completed in 1886 under the watchful eye of master road builder Thomas Bain, the Swartberg Pass almost poetically connects the Little Karoo with the Great Karoo – with the added bonus of the fantastical diversion into Gamkaskloof thrown in halfway.

In normal, dry conditions, the pass can be driven in any car with decent ground clearance. (Gamkaskloof is 4x4 only.) But when you add snow to the mix, things change dramatically. Since most of us in South Africa are *niks gewoond nie*, the townsfolk from both the Oudtshoorn and the Prince Albert side go all tizzy once word is out that the snow is sticking to the ground up there.

Keep an eye on news reports since the pass is often closed during heavy snow. Do not attempt the drive without a 4x4, and even then, if you're unfamiliar with driving in snow, rather stay home as it can be dangerous. Ensure that you're adequately dressed for the cold temperatures.

Contact: Prince Albert Tourism 📞 023 541 1366; Oudtshoorn & De Rust Tourism 📞 044 279 2532 – Sam Reinders





BEAUFORT WEST

59 *Karoo National Park*

Many travellers see this underrated park as an overnight stop, but you should spend two or more nights here to appreciate it properly.

A highlight is Klipspringer Pass – from the Rooivalle viewpoint it feels like you're looking out over the entire Karoo. There's a 400 m Fossil Trail near the rest camp: It's the perfect place to teach your kids about the ancient creatures that lived in Beaufort West, long before there was a Steers.

Accommodation in the park includes camping (from R370 per night for two people), chalets (from R1 580 per night for two people) and two cottages next to the Nuweveld 4x4 Trail: Afsaal (from R1 100 per night for two people) and Embizweni (from R1 300 per night for four people).

Conservation fee: R63 per adult; R31 per child under 12; free with a Wild card.

Where? 5 km west of Beaufort West, next to the N1.

Contact: ☎ 023 415 2828 (reception); ☎ 012 428 9111 (bookings);

📍 sanparks.org – *Toast Coetzer*



60 *Greet a tortoise*

One day when I'm reincarnated, I'm hoping to return to this dusty, hot earth as a tortoise.

A beautiful, big leopard tortoise. (A fully grown one – crows feast on the little ones.)

You'll find these quiet thinkers everywhere in the Karoo. When you see one, pull over and say hello. From a distance, mind you: Please never pick up a tortoise. If you do, they tend to urinate on you, but that "urine" is actually their water reserve. I once watched a female tortoise release that precious water to soften cement-hard soil so she could lay her eggs.

If you see a tortoise on a busy tar road, that's a different matter. Pull over where it's safe and run back to carry the tortoise over the road before the next truck comes rumbling by. For all you know, that tortoise might be me. – *Toast Coetzer*



TOAST COETZER



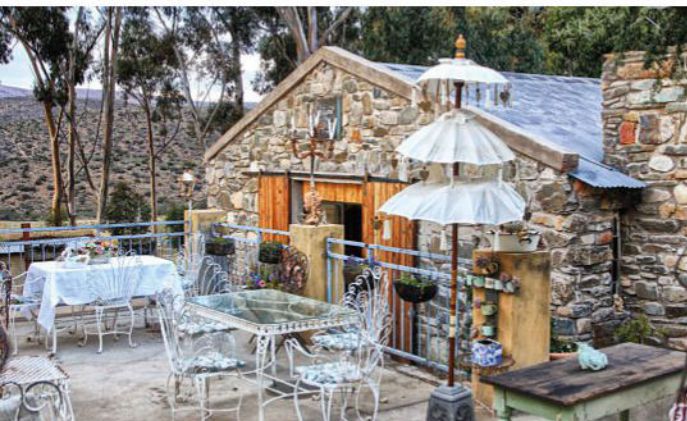
CHRIS MARAIS

RIETBRON

61 *Spot the springbok!*

Being 85 km from Beaufort West, 114 km from Aberdeen, 67 km from Willowmore and 124 km from Prince Albert comes with a certain kind of street cred. There's no doubt that you're in the Great Karoo here – the *vlaktes* go on forever!

There's also another reason to visit Rietbron: It has the only church in South Africa with a springbok on its steeple. Bring your binoculars for a closer look, or take a zoom-lens photo of the springbok silhouette against the wide, open sky. – *Kyra Tarr*



WILLOWMORE

62 *Sophie's Choice*

Quirkiness meets elegance at this roadside haven, where you'll find good coffee and food surrounded by roses, angels, cherubs, chandeliers, and assorted antiques. Owner Sophia van der Merwe has a gift for creating harmony and beauty. There's a vegetable garden reflected in a long water feature, waddling ducks and geese, welcoming trees and the sound of birdsong. Her most popular dishes are lamb curry or lamb shank with vegetables and mash (R210), or bobotie topped with phyllo pastry and vegetables (R150).

The Keurfontein guest farm is on the same property – accommodation from about R650 per person sharing, self-catering (meal options also available).

Opening times: Weekdays from 8 am to 5 pm; weekends from 8 am to 3 pm.

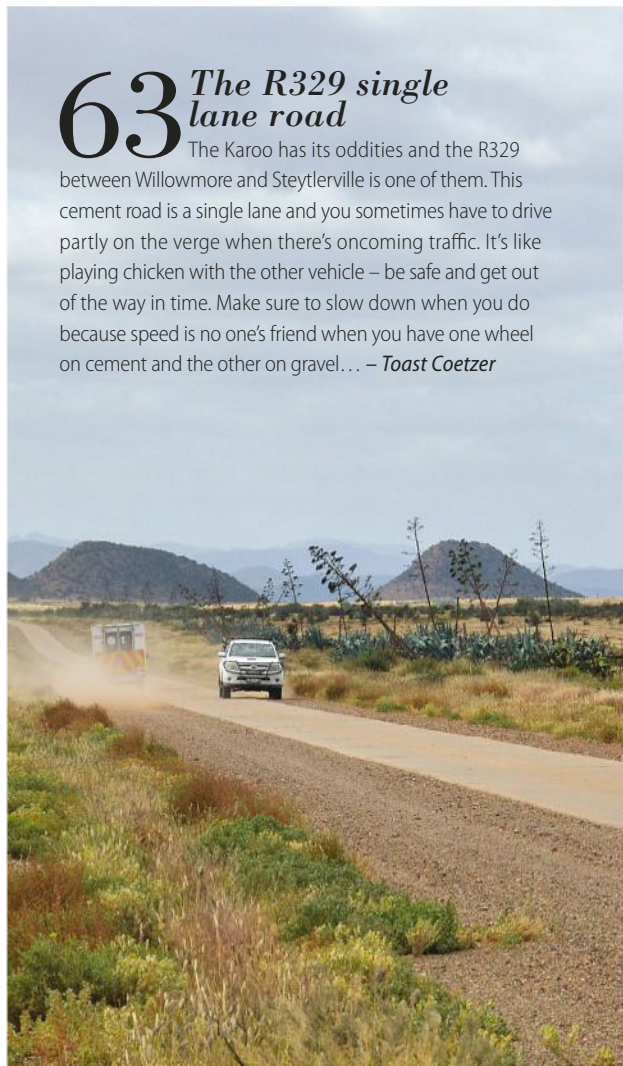
Where? 19 km south of Willowmore, next to the N9.

Contact: ☎ 073 140 5630 (Sophia); 📧 sophieschoice.co.za

– *Julienne du Toit*

63 *The R329 single lane road*

The Karoo has its oddities and the R329 between Willowmore and Steytleville is one of them. This cement road is a single lane and you sometimes have to drive partly on the verge when there's oncoming traffic. It's like playing chicken with the other vehicle – be safe and get out of the way in time. Make sure to slow down when you do because speed is no one's friend when you have one wheel on cement and the other on gravel... – *Toast Coetzer*



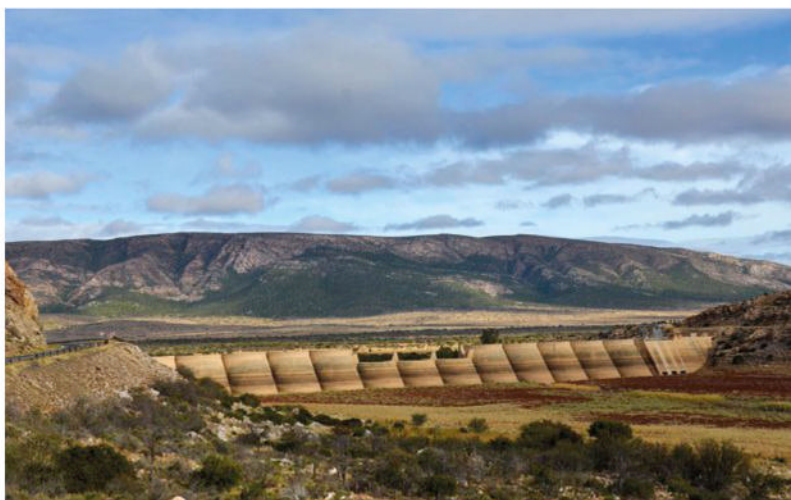
64 *Beervlei Dam*

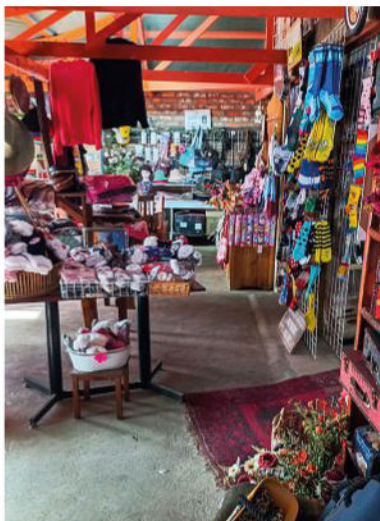
Maybe, while on your way to the seaside, you've also pulled over at Beervlei near Willowmore to look at this seemingly always-empty dam next to the N9. At the picnic site below the dam wall, a sign explains that Beervlei (built between 1953 and 1957) is a flood-control dam. Although it does sometimes have water, like in December 2021 and January 2022, its main purpose is to act as a buffer.

When flood water arrives from the dam's enormous catchment area, it can cause serious damage downstream along the Groot River (the name of the river that starts below the dam), and especially in the important farming area of the Gamtoos River Valley (the Groot River joins the Gamtoos near Patensie). The Beervlei Dam wall is thus a preventative measure. *Netjies, nê?*

Where? 29 km north of Willowmore, next to the N9.

– *Toast Coetzer*





65 *Oppi-Vlak Padstal*

The 117 km section of N9 between Aberdeen and Willowmore always catches me at a time when I feel like an afternoon nap. There's only one way to stay awake: I need to eat a biscuit.

This farm stall opened in 2011 when San-Marie Meiring and her husband Danie realised they needed another source of income to supplement their farming activities. (Rain in the area follows an Olympic cycle – good rains only fall every four years.) Miniature donkeys, sheep, goats and chickens roam the yard so close the gate behind you.

Their speciality is roosterkoek with different fillings, like venison (R70), biltong and cheese (R60) and chicken mayo (R70). The pies also offer good value for money at R30 (takeaway).

But I'm here for the biscuits. Big packets of custard biscuits and Romany Cream-style chocolate biscuits cost R140 each. You'll thank me later!

Opening times: Weekdays from 8 am to 4 pm; weekends from 8 am to 2 pm.

Where? 41 km north of Willowmore, next to the N9.

Contact: 📞 083 421 4409 (San-Marie); "Oppi-Vlak Padstal" on Facebook – *Toast Coetzer*



STEYTLERVILLE

66 *The Karroo Theatrical Hotel*

Of all the experiences you could enjoy in a dorp, the Steytlerville Follies has to rank as one of the most unusual. Freddy Ferrari and Dame Leyla Lamborghini host a glittering musical soiree every Saturday night at the Karroo Theatrical Hotel. Expect a great dinner, a ventriloquist, swagged velvet curtains, sequins, a grand piano, and fabulous music.

Concert pianist Mark Hinds (aka Freddy) and his partner Jacques Rabie (aka Dame Leyla) team up to create an unforgettable evening. And don't blink at the end...

The show is only for overnight guests. They offer various packages – the Saturday Romantic Getaway (from R2 160 per couple) includes the show, one night's accommodation, canapés, dinner, and a buffet breakfast on Sunday morning.

Midweek accommodation rates from R2 100 for two people sharing (DB&B).

Where? On the eastern outskirts of Steytlerville.

Contact: 📞 072 424 7185; 🌐 karroohotel.co.za

– *Julienne du Toit*





67 *Pegasus Early Motoring Museum*

This museum (pictured, above) is a petrol-head's dream! You can see beautifully restored cars including a 1948 Ford Anglia (with a Ford 302 V8 engine), a 1966 Ford GT40, a 1974 Opel Manta GT and a 1961 Morris Minor 1000.

Owners Jurie and Michelle Prinsloo run the museum in tandem with the Verandah Coffee Shop and their wildlife rehabilitation centre, Steytleville Wildlife Rescue, all on the same premises.

Jurie has almost finished restoring a 1956 Ford Consul 1500 – a 12-year labour of love. Besides the cars, visitors can take in the shelves of motoring memorabilia: model cars, posters and various vintage garage essentials.

Opening times: Daily from 9am to 5pm.

Entry fee: Visiting the museum is free, but donations towards the wildlife rehabilitation centre are appreciated.

Address: 52 Sarel Cilliers Street

Contact: 073 909 5904 (Jurie);

📧 pegasuservicestation@gmail.com

– Kyra Tarr



TOAST COETZER

JANSENVILLE

68 *Cawood's General Dealer*

Mount Stewart is a railway station settlement between Steytleville and Jansenville. In its heyday in the middle of the 20th century, this general dealer was the centre of trade, commerce and – one can only imagine – gossip in the area. It's named after the family whose farm it was built on.

As more people left the platteland to find work in the city, Cawood's was closed, and stayed closed, becoming nothing more than an interesting subject for photographs. Pause here and imagine all the activity that once filled its rooms. Picture the excitement of those waiting for the train – perhaps a child returning from boarding school, or the latest papers arriving, detailing the week's news. A mother might have ordered fabric from Port Elizabeth to make a new dress...

Where? Mount Stewart is on the R338 south of Klipplaat – in itself a lonely outpost worth visiting. The closest "big" town is Jansenville, 32 km away via a back road. – Kyra Tarr

ABERDEEN

69 *Ostrich palaces*

Although ostrich palaces are usually associated with Oudtshoorn, Aberdeen also has seven such stately homes. They hark back to the ostrich-feather boom at the turn of the 20th century, when European markets couldn't get enough of these birds' ornate plumes.

Pagel House, originally known as Claremont House, was built in 1897 and first owned by ostrich trader RC Logie Junior. It now belongs to Lyn Dugmore, who has restored it to its former glory and runs it as a guesthouse (17 Stockenström Street; 072 170 3914). Accommodation from R560 per person sharing; or R660 with breakfast.

Other houses include Greenfields (diagonally across from Pagel House in Stockenström Street), Carmen Villa (opposite Standard Bank in Porter Street) and De Denne (corner of Brand and Darling streets). These are private residences so you'll have to satisfy your curiosity from the pavement.

Contact: Aberdeen Tourism Office 049 846 0067

– Kyra Tarr



TOAST COETZER



GRAAFF-REINET

70 *Maria's Roastery*

If you are looking for the best coffee in Graaff-Reinet, you will find it at Maria's Roastery at Our Yard. (These two places, together with Hello You restaurant and the Afrikanis Rum tasting room – see #72 – are all in the same area along Somerset Street.) There's a shady courtyard full of tables, cosy inside nooks, craft gin, and a raft of locals and visitors enjoying the good food and addictive whiffs of roasting coffee. You can also buy a bag of the good stuff to brew at home: from R99 for a 250 g bag.

Opening times: Weekdays from 8 am to 5 pm; Saturdays from 8 am to 4 pm.

Address: 50 Somerset Street

Contact: ☎ 049 891 0337; "Maria's Superior Coffee" on Facebook – *Julienne du Toit*

71 *Graaff-Reinet museums*

Graaff-Reinet has had a long, occasionally gory history: Many battles were fought in the area between the trek farmers and the Bushmen in the 18th century, for example. Its past is also somewhat alcohol-drenched: By the 1850s, backyard brandy "grog shops" abounded... These stories and many others are told in five beautifully kept museums.

The museum entrance fees are structured to encourage you to visit them all in a day: See all five for R150 per person; four for R120; three for R110; two for R70; or pick one for R40. Should you need to spread your visits over more than a day, that's okay. "Just let us know," says head curator Anziske Kayster. Start at the **Old Library Museum** (corner of Church and Somerset streets), which gives you a good, agreeably eccentric, overview of life in town. The building is also the HQ for Graaff-Reinet Tourism.

Then head to the **Reinet House Museum** (at the end of Parsonage Street; pictured, right), which once belonged to the Reverend Andrew Murray. There's a famous gnarled grapevine at the back, planted in 1870 and still surviving heat and frost, and even a bout of fungal rot. Inside is period furniture, ancient dentist drills and a transport section with an old wagon. Reinet House has the only witblits distilling licence in town: Don't leave without a bottle of Withond (R180 for 750 ml). Drink with caution!

From there, it's a short walk through the garden to **Urquhart House** (at the end of Market Square on the corner with Somerset Street). If you've been wondering what a peach pip floor looks like, this is where you'll find one, regularly re-varnished with aloe juice. How did they catch mice or cut beans in Victorian times? How did they compress a cork, roast coffee, have hot water on tap? This is where you'll find out.

Anyone with an interest in the Anglo-Boer War shouldn't miss the **Old Residency Museum** (corner of Parsonage and Murray streets) and the **Anglo-Boer War Military History Museum** (Murray Street, next to Reinet House Museum).

Opening times: All are open on weekdays from 8 am to 4 pm. Reinet House is open on weekends from 9 am to 1 pm (including public holidays); for the others, see the website.

Contact: 📍 graaffreinet.co.za – *Julienne du Toit*



72 *Afrikanis Rum*

Dawid and Karlien de Wet fell in love with this spicy, fruity alcohol while travelling in Madagascar and the Seychelles. Afrikanis Rum was born during lockdown to stem their wanderlust. (The De Wets also run the tour companies Toerboer and Karoo360.) Afrikanis is a small-batch, botanically infused sipping rum. Although not distilled on site (it's made in Cape Town), Afrikanis captures the essence of the couple's adventurous spirit – and the indigenous African dog breed it's named after.

You can try all their variations at the Afrikanis Rum Tasting Room in the courtyard at the back of Hello You restaurant. A 750 ml bottle of rum starts at R475. They also make a range of hand and body lotions and they sell some cool T-shirts, caps and sweatshirts sporting their dog logo.

Opening times: Monday to Saturday from 8 am to 9 pm (also the hours for Hello You restaurant) – rum tastings from 11 am to 8 pm.

Address: 52 Somerset Street

Contact: ☎ 083 538 2865; 📍 afrikanis.co.za – *Julienne du Toit*



73 *Tim's Tequila Tour*

Even those who have stories that end with, "And that's why I can never drink tequila again!" usually end up thoughtfully tasting the different brands of tequila, mezcal, *joven* and *añejo*, local and imported, that Tim Murray deftly serves up at the end of his Tequila Tour.

Tim was one of the first to get involved in agave cultivation back in the late 1990s. (The big white shed next to the N9 north of town is a relic of that time.) These slow-growing plants from Mexico are cousins of the actual tequila plant, but they deliver just as much of a kick.

Tim has a tequila brand called Three Agaves – it's distilled in Ventersdorp in the North West using agave from Tim's farm, Roode Bloem. (The farm is where morning and evening tours start – prior booking is essential.)

Cost: R500 for the first two people; thereafter R90 per extra person; max 12 per group. A 750 ml bottle of Three Agaves Silver costs R400 online or R460 from Our Yard (50 Somerset Street).

Contact: 📞 082 632 3103 (Tim); 📧 threeagaves.karooheart.co.za

– *Julienne du Toit*



74 *Camdeboo National Park*

This national park stretches most of the way around Graaff-Reinet: You're likely to see kudu, springbok, klipspringer, mountain zebra, blesbok and black wildebeest. There's also a herd of buffalo that keep to the apron veld near Nqweba Dam, preferring to stay in thickly vegetated areas and therefore seldom spotted.

Animals aside, the main reason you'll come here is to see the view from the Valley of Desolation viewpoint, where towering pillars of jointed ironstone glow in the late afternoon. Visitors chatter as they arrive but often fall into meditative silence. Kestrels, southern boubous and red-winged starlings fly among the columns of this natural rock cathedral. Every now and then, a dassie pops up its head to say howzit.

Accommodation in the park ranges from camping (R300 per night for two people) to the Lakeview Tented Camp (from R820 per night for two people).

Conservation fee: R52 per adult; R26 per child under 12; free with a Wild card.

Where? There are three gates: For Valley of Desolation and the game-viewing area north of the dam, use the R63. For main reception, Lakeview Tented Camp and Nqweba Campsite, use the N9.

Contact: 📞 012 428 9111; 🌐 sanparks.org – *Julienne du Toit*



NIEU-BETHESDA

75 *The Owl House*

At the Owl House, the former residence of outsider artist Helen Martins (1897 – 1976), you can get an intimate view of her creativity. But she wasn't the only artist who worked here: Her vision inspired others, like Piet van der Merwe and Koos Malgas. Malgas worked with Martins for 12 years and many of the cement sculptures in the Camel Yard are the result of his handiwork.

The Owl House is like a fire that's always burning, which kindles the imagination of everyone who sees it. Leave the (slightly spooky) interior, walk out into the sunlight and around to the street where you'll find artists like Ben Witbooi selling their own cement owls (from R50).

At the reception office (where you might meet Angela Goliath, Michaela Jacobs or Michelle Jacobs – pictured right), you can also buy a ticket that includes a visit to the Kitching Fossil Exploration Centre – it's within walking distance.

Opening times: Daily from 8 am to 5 pm (from 9 am in winter).

Kitching Centre: Monday to Wednesday from 8 am to 4 pm; Thursday to Sunday from 9 am to 5 pm.

Entry fee: Owl House R70 per person; Kitching Centre R60 per person; combined ticket R110.

Address: The Owl House is in Martin Street; Kitching Centre is in Hudson Street.

Contact: Owl House ☎ 049 841 1733; 🌐 theowlhouse.co.za; Kitching Centre ☎ 082 216 6479; 🌐 kfec.co.za – *Toast Coetzer*



76 *Stirlings @ The Ibis restaurant*

Stirlings @ The Ibis offers a unique Karoo Food Experience – a multi-course tasting menu celebrating local flavours (R250 food only; R380 with paired drinks).

The menu changes with the seasons. A recent one had lamb for main course, but with a twist, as chef Barbara Weitz explains: "I roll lamb's belly with wild mint foraged from the furrow system in town; then I cook it slowly with lashings of red wine, tomatoes and more wild mint. It's served on *umqa*, a Xhosa dish of mielie pap and pumpkin. I also incorporate some *wilde-als*, or artemisia, to give a hint of sweet bitterness on the palate, and I serve the dish with preserved quince from the village and roasted beetroot from the garden, sprinkled with our own Karoo *bossie* blend."

Barbara learnt about edible veld plants from local resident Neville Swiers (pictured left with Barbara), who in turn learnt about them from his grandfather.

Walk-ins are welcome, but the Karoo Food Experience must be booked in advance. À la carte dishes include *skilpadjies* with home-made bread (R80); sow thistle and dandelion pasta with zatar-spiced vegetables (R100); and slow-cooked mutton rogan josh with spiced rice, poppadom and vygie chutney (R180).

They also offer accommodation at The Ibis B&B, starting from R500 per person sharing, breakfast included.

Opening times: Friday to Monday from noon to 8 pm (lunch and dinner).

Address: Martin Street

Contact: ☎ 072 110 6254; 🌐 theibislounge.co.za – *Julienne du Toit*

77 *Ganora Fossil Museum*

Three hundred million years ago, the Karoo was like an Okavango Delta of sorts. There was high biodiversity, from fish and snails to car-sized tortoises and great big predators with scary teeth. This was where the first mammal-like reptiles evolved, unique in the world.

Farmer JP Steynberg and his sons Louis and Renier have collected a world-class assemblage of fossils of these animals, all discovered on their farm, Ganora. Expert palaeontologists have worked with him to make the museum an exceptional destination. Day visitors are welcome but you must book in advance. (See page 73 for more info about their accommodation offerings.)

Where? 8 km east of Nieu-Bethesda.

Cost: Fossil museum and talk R70 per person; fossil veld walk R200 per person.

Contact: ☎ 082 698 0029 (Hester); 📧 ganora.co.za – *Julienne du Toit*



78 *Climb Compassberg*

You can see the sharp peak of the highest point in the Karoo (2 504 m) from a long way off – even from the N1 when you're driving between Richmond and Hanover if you know where to look.

Compassberg is on private land: If you want to climb it, you have to go with a guide like Dawid de Wet from Toerboer. You won't need ropes and other gear, but it's steep and you sometimes have to scramble. There's only one route and you might need your guide to pull you up.

But all the effort is worth it. From the top, the landscape unrolls forever. It's a full-day outing and costs R2 500 per group of 1–4 hikers; R3 000 if there are more than four.

While you're there, why not climb the other two highest peaks in the Sneeuwerberg range? Dawid's 3 Peaks Challenge also includes Toorberg (2 106 m) and Nardousberg (2 420 m). You climb each mountain on successive days and spend each night in a guesthouse with a cosy bed and delicious meals (R5 250 per person sharing).

Contact: 📧 toerboer.co.za; "Hike the Karoo" on Facebook – *Willem van der Berg*





CRADOCK

79 *Die Tuishuise*

This amazing, preserved streetscape happened thanks to Sandra Antrobus. While helping to restore Olive Schreiner's old home in Cross Street in the 1980s, Sandra would drive past the crumbling historic cottages on Market Street. She bought one, restored it, and bought another. All the houses, each with a different character, are furnished with antiques, as is the frontier-era Victoria Manor Hotel (all in Market Street).

They've become one of South Africa's bucket list stays, still owned and run by the Antrobus family. Accommodation from R630 per person sharing (B&B) at Victoria Manor; R735 per person sharing (B&B) in a Tuishuis. The restaurant at the Manor is open for lunch (weekdays only) and dinner (every night); anyone is welcome to enjoy the delicious Karoo food.

Contact: 📞 048 881 1650; 🌐 tuishuise.co.za

– *Julienne du Toit*



80 *Karoo Food Festival*

The Karoo Food Festival in Cradock, now going for more than a decade, was set up with the simple aim of celebrating great local food ingredients and talented cooks.

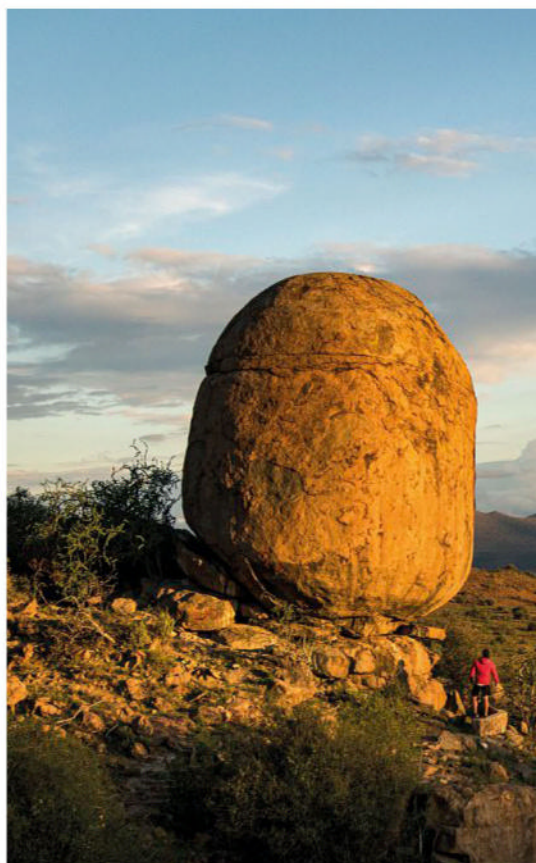
The food fest runs over a weekend, usually in late April. On the Friday night, there's a street party in Market Street with live music and stalls selling delicious items like lamb sosaties and roosterkoek with pulled pork. Look out for honey made from Karoo flowers, and locally grown pecans and walnuts.

The next day is hosted at a venue called Jenkins Creek (🌐 jenkinscreek.co.za), just outside town. Offerings vary from year to year, but usually you'll find pomegranate products, jams of all kinds of fruit, jaffles, koeksisters and *turksvystroop* (prickly pear syrup). And don't miss the potjiekos competition!

When? Check Facebook for the 2024 date announcement.

Contact: 📞 048 881 1650; 🌐 reservations@tuishuise.co.za; "Karoo Food Festival" on Facebook

– *Julienne du Toit*





81 *Mountain Zebra National Park*

I love the massive vistas in this park, and the incomparably fresh air. Sightings are always interesting: mountain reedbuck cantering up a hill; cute ground squirrels; maybe a young caracal on a mission... Take the drive up to Rooiplaat to see herds of springbok and black wildebeest chasing each other.

You might also spot cheetah (there's a popular cheetah tracking excursion for R505 per person), lion, aardwolf, brown hyena and buffalo. Birders can look for specials like blue crane, Denham's bustard and Sclater's lark.

Accommodation includes camping (R380 per night for two people) and self-catering chalets (from R1 410 per night for two people).

Conservation fee: R63 per adult; R31 per child under 12; free with a Wild card.

Where? 12 km north-west of Cradock off the R61.

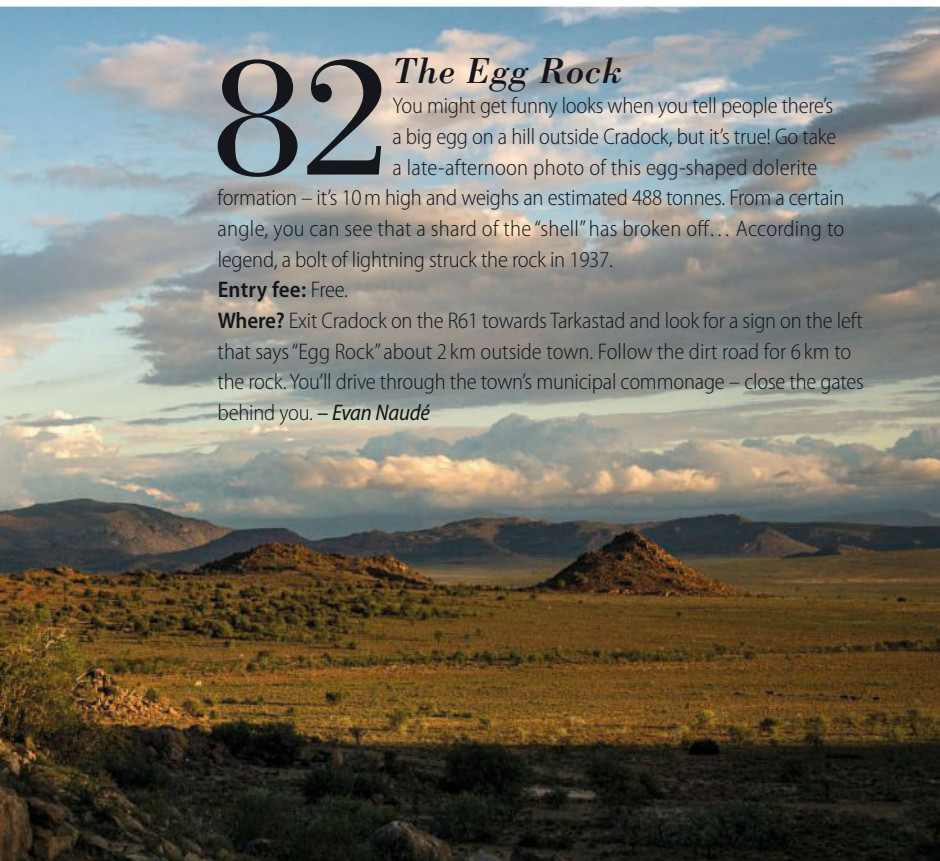
Contact: 📞 012 428 9111 (reservations); 🌐 sanparks.org – *Julienne du Toit*

82 *The Egg Rock*

You might get funny looks when you tell people there's a big egg on a hill outside Cradock, but it's true! Go take a late-afternoon photo of this egg-shaped dolerite formation – it's 10 m high and weighs an estimated 488 tonnes. From a certain angle, you can see that a shard of the "shell" has broken off... According to legend, a bolt of lightning struck the rock in 1937.

Entry fee: Free.

Where? Exit Cradock on the R61 towards Tarkastad and look for a sign on the left that says "Egg Rock" about 2 km outside town. Follow the dirt road for 6 km to the rock. You'll drive through the town's municipal commonage – close the gates behind you. – *Evan Naudé*



SUPPLIED

83 *Daggaboer Farm Stall*

Under new ownership since 2022, Daggaboer is one of those spots that has reached iconic status on any Eastern Cape road trip. (Back in 2011, they won the *go!* Farm Stall of the Year competition.) Sit on the stoep and enjoy a venison pie, which is served with curried beans, salad and chutney (R65); or a roosterkoek with fillings like curried mince and cheese (R65), or boerewors with tomato relish (R65).

Inside, you'll find tasty products for your pantry and an assortment of homeware: baskets, leather goods, hides, even mohair duvets – a queen-size inner costs R2 700. If you're looking for sheepskin slippers, you're also in luck (R1 255).

Opening times: Weekdays from 8 am to 5 pm; weekends from 8 am to 3 pm.

Where? N10, 48 km south of Cradock.

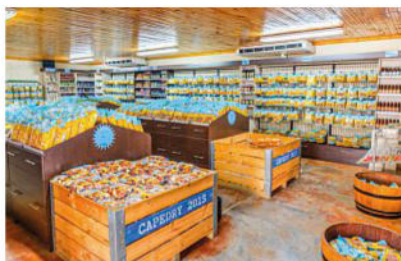
Contact: 📞 087 807 8165; "Daggaboer Farm Stall" on Facebook – *Kyra Tarr*

MONTAGU

84 *Cogmans-kloof*

This 6,5 km pass on Route 62 (actually more of a poort) connects Ashton and Montagu. It was originally a wagon route that followed the course of the Cogmans River through the valley. After being damaged by regular floods, Thomas Bain was appointed in 1873 to build a road. The ribbon was cut for the new dirt-road pass in 1887; the pass was tarred in 1931; and major renovations were completed in 2022.

Pull over at the tunnel through a hill called Kalkoenkrans – it's the unofficial "gateway" to the Little Karoo. Follow the footpath up to the ruin of a fort on top, built during the Anglo-Boer War. – *Evan Naudé*



SUPPLIED

85 *Capedry Montagu Farm Stall*

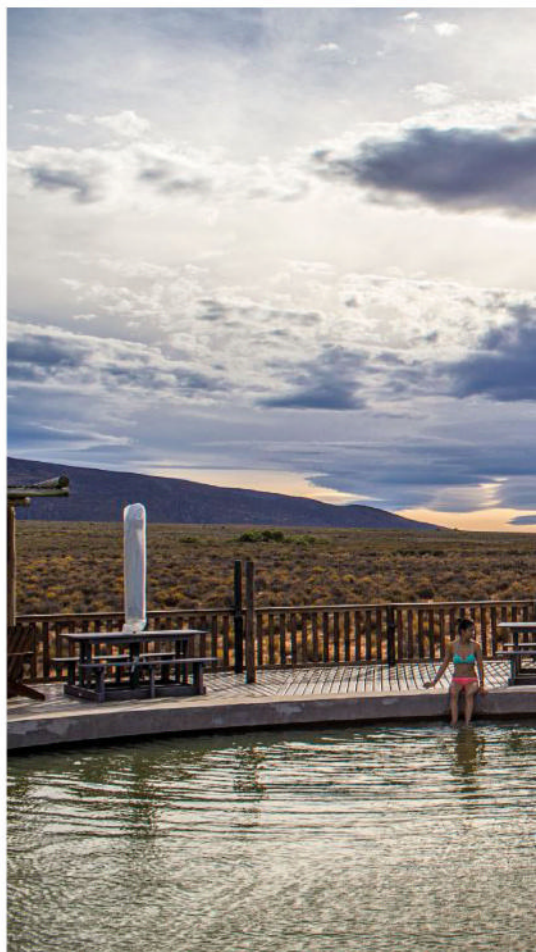
Stock up on a wide variety of dried fruit, nuts and products like chutney and jam. The 500 g packs offer good value: peaches (R69); apricots (R120); bananas (R58).

A tractor tour (30 minutes; free) departs at 11 am on Saturdays, taking visitors on a tour of the orchards, drying lanes and the factory plant on the farm next door. Capedry also has a restaurant and a wine shop.

Opening times: Weekdays from 7.15 am to 5 pm; Saturday from 8 am to 5 pm; Sunday from 9 am to 3 pm.

Address: 102 Bath Street

Contact: ☎ 023 614 1134; 🌐 capedry.co.za – *Evan Naudé*



86 *Guano Cave*

This cave in the Langeberg is home to thousands of bats – mostly Natal long-fingered bats and Temminck's hairy bats. The cave was mined for guano in the 1890s and now forms part of the Montagu Guano Cave Resort. Day visitors are welcome to explore the site – a tractor with a trailer takes you to the foot of the mountain and there are 190 steps to climb to get to the cave.

Overnight options include camping (from R110 per person), safari tents that feel more like cottages (from R900 per night for four people) and the Mountain View units (from R1 500 for max of four adults and two children). These rates are for Mondays to Thursdays during the low season; they're higher over weekends and during school holidays.

Opening times: Daily from 8 am to 5 pm.

Cost: Tractor or jeep ride to the bat cave R150 per adult; R130 per child under 12. Tours depart at 10 am, 1 pm and 3 pm. See the website for other activities and prices.

Where? 6 km east of Montagu, next to the R62.

Contact: 📞 023 100 2972; 🌐 montaguguanocave.co.za

– Evan Naudé



87 *Anysberg Nature Reserve*

This CapeNature reserve is roughly 70 km from Montagu, Ladismith, Touws River and Laingsburg. The Makadas train used to link the farms in this region to the outside world, but after the Laingsburg flood destroyed the railway line between Touws River and Ladismith in 1981, the farms were sold and the 800 km² Anysberg Nature Reserve was proclaimed to protect mountain fynbos and Karoo veld. As part of the Cape Floral Region Protected Area, Anysberg is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Look for red hartebeest, gemsbok and mountain zebra. You can camp (from R170 per night for two people; R30 per extra person – max six people per stand) or stay in one of the six self-catering cottages (from R780 per night for two people). The reserve has trails for hiking and mountain biking; a 4x4 route; and a big farm dam to swim in when it's hot. You can also go horse riding for R220 per person (two hours).

Conservation fee: R50 per adult; R30 per child; free with a Wild card.

Where? There are several entrance gates – see the website for directions.

Contact: 📞 087 087 3036; 🌐 capenature.co.za

– Evan Naudé



BARRYDALE

88 *House of Books*

House of Books has books to fill an entire platteland library. There are books in the entranceway, hallway, living room, bedrooms – even the toilet!

Ask owner Anton de Villiers if you're looking for something specific because he knows where each of the roughly 40 000 books are. He's also a photographer and a film producer – some of his striking photos can be seen among the shelves.

Opening times: Daily from 10 am to 4 pm.

Address: 37 Van Riebeeck Street

Contact: ☎ 028 572 1024;

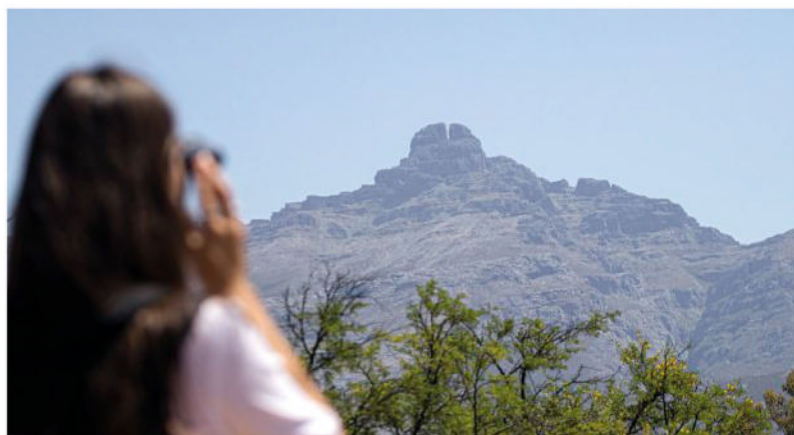
✉ mcgrudsters@gmail.com – *Evan Naudé*

89 *Brandrivier Road*

As the main artery of the Little Karoo, the R62 offers heaps of scenic treats like the magnificent Huisrivier Pass. But that's not all: Grab a map and you'll find that there are lots of dirt roads that turn off the R62 and wind into the surrounding farmland...

One of them is the Brandrivier Road, which turns off to the right about 17 km east of Barrydale. You'll drive through the more arid parts of the Little Karoo and eventually come to the R323 tar road. Turn right and drive to Muiskraal Farm Stall where you can buy olive products at great prices, like 5 litres of olive oil for only R470. A 640 g jar of olives costs only R76. You'll be the queen of sundowner snacks for weeks!

A dirt road turns east opposite Muiskraal. Follow this route back to Vanwyksdorp and then take the beautiful Rooiberg Pass, which will deliver you just south of Calitzdorp. The entire route is about 150 km long and you can usually drive it in any vehicle with high ground clearance. – *Toast Coetzer*



LADISMITH

90 *Towerkop*

Next time you're in Ladismith, look up at the peaks of the Klein-Swartberg. See the one with the cleft in it? That's Towerkop: It's 2 189 m high and that fissure is almost 30 m deep!

Towerkop was climbed for the first time in 1885 by Gustaf Nefdt, a local farmer. It's a challenging slog and usually takes two days – you overnight in a cave called Nel se Grot. The last section to the top is only for experienced rock climbers with the necessary safety equipment. Contact The Mountain Club of South Africa to arrange for entry to the property.

Contact: ☎ 021 465 3412; ✉ mcsacapetown.co.za – *Evan Naudé*



91 *Seweweekspoort*

The road through this poort was completed in 1862, built to connect the Little Karoo with the Great Karoo. The R323 goes through the poort and eventually joins up with the N1 near Laingsburg.

Seweweekspoort is 17 km long and mostly along level terrain – it's usually traversable in any vehicle with decent ground clearance. You'll cross the Seweweekes River 23 times and you can stop along the way to look at proteas, aloes and seven-weeks ferns. Seweweekspoort Peak (2 325 m) – on the north-western side of the poort – is the highest point in the Western Cape.

Also go have a look at the wall of the Tierkloof Dam on the southern side of the poort – there are shade trees for a rest stop before you continue your journey.

Where? Turn onto the R323 from the R62 about halfway between Calitzdorp and Ladismith.

More about Ladismith: ☎ 028 050 0158 (tourism office); 🌐 ladismithtourismbureau.co.za

– Evan Naudé

92 *Gamkapoort Dam*

Last time I was here, Fox Ledebour was the only person at Gamkapoort Dam – he keeps an eye on the dam wall and the affordable self-catering accommodation there. (Contact him directly for rates.)

Gamkapoort Dam was empty for many years but filled again in 2023. Go have a look while the water is still there! And take a newspaper or a new *go!* magazine for Fox – he's always looking for something to read.

Where? From Ladismith (66 km), drive through Seweweekspoort and turn right – soon you'll reach the narrow Bosluiskloof Pass, which takes you to the dam.

From Laingsburg (95 km), follow the R323 in the folds of the mountains and through farms like Vleiland, until you descend to the dam via Bosluiskloof Pass.

Contact: ☎ 072 925 8421 (Fox);

✉ gamkapoordam@gmail.com;

🌐 gamkapoordam.co.za – *Toast Coetzer*



FOX LEDEBOER



CALITZDORP

93 *Elnatan Calitzdorp Fruit*

I'll never drive through the Little Karoo without buying peaches. This is a promise! In summer I buy fresh peaches; at other times I buy dried peaches. My mother loves dried peaches and I usually buy her a pack at the Elnatan farm stall when I drive through Calitzdorp. A 1 kg bag of dried peaches costs R147, 1 kg of dried pears costs R120 and a 450 g fig roll R95. Ask the friendly manager Natasja van Heerden (pictured left) to tell you more about where the fruit comes from.

Elnatan Calitzdorp Fruit was started in 1999 by the German-Swiss couple Klaus and Ursula Triebe. They run it as a non-profit and have helped to fund projects like a local crèche. When you buy something here, you're not only buying something authentic to the Little Karoo but you're benefiting the people who live there, too.

Opening times: Daily from 8 am to 5 pm (closed on Sundays, except during school holidays).

Where? On the R62, about 3 km west of Calitzdorp.

Contact: 📞 083 382 2035; ✉️ elnatanagape@gmail.com

– Toast Coetzer

94 *Groenfontein back road*

In Calitzdorp, turn north off the R62 onto Wesoeur Road or Calitz Street – they both eventually reach the same dirt road, the Groenfontein Road, which follows the Nels River through the foothills of the Swartberg. Along the way you'll see the Nels River Dam, guesthouses, wine farms and artists' studios.

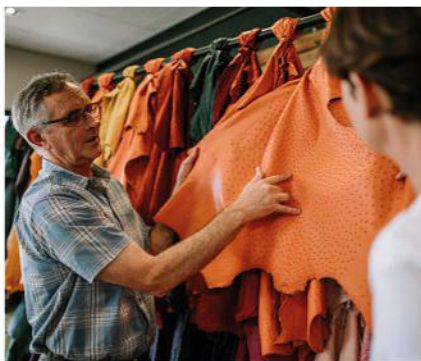
Pop into Karoo Zen for unique jewellery (📞 karoozen.co.za), taste wine at Peter Bayly (📞 peterbayly.co.za), and buy art at the Kraaldoring Gallery (by prior booking only: 📞 082 925 0871) or the Kruisrivier Gallery & Roger Young Studio (📞 everyyoungphotography.co.za).

About 29 km from Calitzdorp, you'll come across the Cango Caves road – drive it for 25 km to get to Kobus se Gat, a restaurant on the R328 at the base of the Swartberg Pass.

More about Calitzdorp: 📞 044 213 3775 (tourism office); ✉️ visitcalitzdorp.co.za

– Evan Naudé





OUTDSHOORN

95 Cape Karoo Ostrich Emporium

At the Ostrich Emporium you can buy everything from ostrich-leather cowboy boots (R2 739 a pair) to ostrich biltong (R474/kg). They also sell ostrich meat and you can sit down at the Tall Goose restaurant in the same building for a taste. Try an ostrich fillet, or ostrich with your pita or pizza (dishes from R110 to R145).

Opening times: Weekdays from 7.30am to 5pm; Saturdays from 8am to 1pm.

Where? On the corner of Langenhoven and Rademeyer streets.

Contact: ☎ 044 279 2127; 🌐 capekarooshop.com; "Tall Goose" on Facebook – *Willem van der Berg*

96 Highgate Ostrich Show Farm

Highgate is the oldest ostrich show farm in the country. You can hold a tiny chick and feed the big birds by hand. You'll be surprised how soft those long necks are!

On a traditional ostrich farm tour (R187 per adult; R121 per child aged 6–12) you'll visit the incubators and breeding camps and get the opportunity to feed the ostriches. Or you can do a tour with a meal included (lunch or dinner) where you'll be served ostrich dishes. (Tour and meal from R372 per adult and R211 per child.)

Opening times: Daily from 8am to 5pm.

Where? Just off the R328, about 11 km south-west of Oudtshoorn.

Contact: ☎ 044 272 7115; 🌐 highgate.co.za – *Willem van der Berg*



97 Gamkaberg Nature Reserve

This 105 km² CapeNature reserve flies under the radar, but is one of the Little Karoo's finest. It was established in 1974 to protect the mountain zebras in the area, but it's also home to kudu, eland, red hartebeest, grysbok and steenbok. The mountainous landscape is incredible.

Stay over in a self-catering unit (R130 per person, shared ablutions) or pitch your tent in the campsite (from R75 per person). The best option, however, is to stay in one of the three so-called "eco-lodges" (pictured; from R350 per person sharing), with permanent safari tents, beds with linen and your own kitchen. It's like your own private bush lodge!

There's a 4x4 trail (R200 per vehicle), five short hiking trails around the main camp, and the two-day Tierkloof Hiking Trail. The latter is a circular route that leads you through three vegetation types: Karoo succulents in the foothills of the Gamkaberg; indigenous forest in a kloof, and fynbos on top of the mountain. You'll overnight in Oukraal camp with fantastic views of the Swartberg and Outeniqua Mountains.

Hiking trails are all free (except for the conservation fee); R340 per night if you stay at Oukraal (sleeps up to eight people; bring your own sleeping bag).

Conservation fee: R50 per adult; R30 per child, free with a Wild card.

Where? About 35 km west of Oudtshoorn.

Contact: ☎ 087 288 0373; 🌐 capenature.co.za – *Evan Naudé*





98 *Cango Caves*

Don't be fooled into thinking that an excursion to the Cango Caves is just for kids or foreign tourists. The caves will blow the socks off anyone who enters their chambers!

The hour-long Heritage Tour offers easy exploration – it departs every hour on the hour and takes you through the six largest and most spectacular halls. A highlight is arriving in Van Zyl's Hall in the darkness and then seeing it revealed when the lights are turned on.

Thrill-seekers can take the 90-minute Adventure Tour, which leaves every hour on the half hour. It covers the same ground as the Heritage Tour, but goes deeper into the cave system where more challenging spelunking awaits. It requires a degree of fitness and a lack of claustrophobia.

Booking is essential to control the numbers of people entering the caves. There's a restaurant and curio shop on site.

Opening times: Daily from 9 am to 4 pm (when the last tour of the day departs); closed on Christmas Day.

Cost: Heritage Tour R170 per adult; R120 per child under 12. Adventure Tour R240 per adult; R170 per child under 12.

Where? R328, about 30 km north of Oudtshoorn.

Contact: 📞 082 303 0029; 🌐 cango-caves.co.za
– Sam Reinders



99 *Wilgewandel Holiday Farm*

This place is a child's dream – and a parent's dream if you need to entertain your rowdy gang for a day. Wilgewandel offers camel rides (R50 for kids under 12; R120 if older), water slides (in summer; R60 per person for an hour), a foefie slide (R10 if you're under 15, otherwise R30), Putt-Putt (R30 per person), donkey-cart rides (weekends and holidays only; R20 for under 18s), and you can also feed the animals (bunnies, a pig, donkeys, goats, ostriches... R10 per person for a bucket of animal feed). Check their website for a full list of activities.

Self-catering accommodation from R450 per adult sharing (B&B also available); children under 14 get a discount.

They also have a lekker restaurant – ostrich burgers are R95 each and milkshakes start at R35. Restaurant opening times: daily from 8.30 am to 5 pm.

Where? R328, about 28 km north of Oudtshoorn.

Contact: 📞 071 387 6529; 🌐 wilgewandel.co.za – Sam Reinders

SUPPLIED



DE RUST

100

The Meiringspoort mermaid

The Swartberg Pass scales the heights of the mountain range, but Meiringspoort – built in 1858 – cuts right through it. Myth and legend follow the curvy road, so roll down those windows and see if your little eyes eye can spy... a mermaid!

According to legend, the waterfall pool (about 12 km from De Rust) is home to a mermaid who occasionally lures someone close to the edge so they can be snatched and pulled underwater. She has also been blamed for the floods that occasionally ravage the narrow poort, damaging the road.

So, not a Disney mermaid, then...

Meiringspoort (mermaid or no mermaid) is a classic South African drive. There are lay-bys (with spotlessly clean toilets) where you can enjoy the spectacle of the cliffs rising up from the Groot River.

In the main road of De Rust, there are plenty of delightful coffee shops where you can stop for refreshments. My two favourites are Café Rust ☎ 079 432 7606 and Pluim Eatery & Coffee ☎ 082 655 7085).

More about De Rust: ☎ 044 279 2532 (tourism office); 🌐 oudtshoorn.com;

🌐 derustheritage.org.za – *Sam Reinders*

101

Amazing aloes

The Karoo is a place where wildflowers surprise you. When aloes bloom (usually) in winter – especially prominent species like the bitter aloe, *Aloe ferox* – their orange-red flowers brighten up the dull veld like licks of fire.

Lots of aloes grow along the R341 between De Rust and Willowmore. Pull over where it's safe, walk up to the fence and take a photo.

Where's your favourite place to see aloes? Send an e-mail to toast@gomag.co.za

More places to see aloes next to main routes:

- N9 west of Graaff-Reinet: **GPS** S32.34222 E24.39008
- N10 south of Middleton: **GPS** S32.97529 E25.81536
- R62 west of the Huis River Pass: **GPS** S33.47434 E21.55309 – *Toast Coetzer*









SELF-DRIVE TOURS



Karoo-experience:
4 days | 3 nights
Damaraland, Etosha
& Kaokoveld:
13 days | 12 nights
Richtersveld:
10 days | 9 nights

Tour guide
Douwe Vlok

www.heuningland.com | info@heuningland.com
+27 72 243 5251





HIKING TOURS



Karoo:
5 days - 103km
Full Moon:
5 days - 65km
Richtersveld:
6 days - 68km

Tour guide
Douwe Vlok

www.heuningland.com | info@heuningland.com
+27 72 243 5251

KAROO BESPOKE






CYCLE THE KAROO HIGHLANDS: LOXTON TO SUTHERLAND

- 265 km, 5 days, R7 715 per person, including farm stays and 3 meals
- Shuttle service back to Loxton - additional fee R580 pp
- Maximum 10 pax, Minimum 6 pax
- March | April | May | September | October | November 2024




'DIE HARDEMAN SE PAD' HIKING TRAIL: LOXTON

- 60 km, 3 days, R2 195 per person
- Slack-packing option: additional fee R480, includes breakfast and dinner per day
- Maximum 10 pax, Minimum 6 pax
- March | April | May | September | October | November 2024

ENQUIRIES: Ingrid Schöfmann 084 7090 218 | ingrid@karooobespoke.co.za



Your online guide to the
Karoo and surrounding countryside
proudly brought to you by our own people

www.onsknk.co.za  

... the beginning of big things to come



CONTACT US
083 538 2865
dawid@toerboer.co.za
www.toerboer.co.za

**BREATHE IN THE SOUL OF THE KAROO WITH TOERBOER™
AND KAROO 360™. ANCIENT SECRETS AWAIT. JOIN US ON
AN UNFORGETTABLE JOURNEY THROUGH THIS
TIMELESS LAND.**

-  Explore Graaff-Reinet like a local
-  Karoo 3 Peaks Challenge and other hikes
-  Graaff-Reinet MTB Tours
-  Camping | Stargazing | Veld Soirees

Official sponsor of the Karoo 360



**BUFFELSDRIFT GAME LODGE IS LOCATED
IN THE HEART OF THE KLEIN KAROO**

WHICH FORMS PART OF THE WORLD-RENOWNED GARDEN ROUTE IN THE WESTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA.

We have a wide variety of activities:

Bush safaris, Night drives, Meerkat safaris,
Lion feeding experience,
Free-roaming cheetah experience,
Elephant feeding experience,
Elephant observation experience
and a Heritage nature walk

Our premises are set up for conferences and
weddings and we have an in-house specialist
to assist with these.

info@buffelsdrift.com | +27(0) 44 272 0000
www.buffelsdrift.com





WIN WITH DE RUSTICA

A getaway weekend can be a fantastic opportunity to relax, experience new things and reload. De Rustica, the world's best olive oil, offers you the opportunity to win a Klein Karoo breakaway weekend for two!

Included are two nights' accommodation in our popular Asher Stable Stay Guesthouse, where you can enjoy the beauty and tranquility of the olive farm.

Discover a world of olive oil by taking part in our olive tours on the farm. It includes olive tastings, tours of the olive groves and the olive oil production process.

To end off your weekend, we give you a bottle of our world-renowned Coratina Extra Virgin Olive Oil to take home.

It is a wonderful reminder to your weekend away and will enrich your cooking experience at home.

To take part, go to our Facebook page and follow the steps. The competition closes on 25 September 2023. The winner will be announced on 2 October 2023.

CALITZDORP



A private venture; the ride does not include the costs of any wine tasting, beverages or meals. It is merely a mode of transport for sightseeing or a mode of transport from wine cellar to wine cellar within the stipulated time slots. Children are welcome on the same terms. Groups of 10+ can contact Zamani Grill to discuss group discount.

Die Wyntreintjie only drives on Saturdays and departs from Zamani Grill (home to The Smallest Bar on Route 62) at 10h00 and then drives past TTT Cellar, Calitzdorp Cellar, the Gamka lookout point, De Krans cellar and Boplaas cellar to end the trip at Zamani Grill.

You can get off at any of the 4 cellars and then the tractor will pick you up again + -1h later to complete the above route.

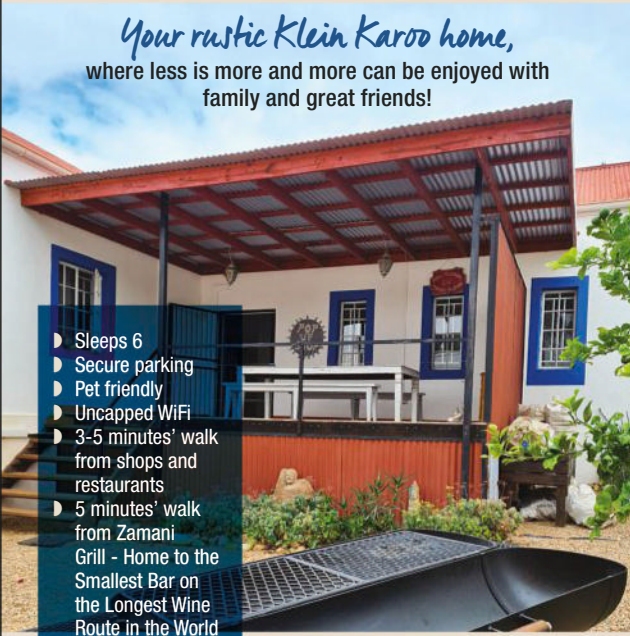
The last "wine tasting departure" from Zamani Grill is 13h00. The last "pick up" at the respective cellars takes place during the 14h00 ride and the tractor finally stops at Zamani Grill at 15h00.

Reservations to be made at Zamani Grill BEFORE 12h00 on Fridays at 083 881 9334 (also via WhatsApp). Zamani Grill is also the perfect place where lunch or dinner can be enjoyed.

Zamani's Place

CALITZDORP
Klein Karoo self catering

Your rustic Klein Karoo home,
where less is more and more can be enjoyed with family and great friends!



- Sleeps 6
- Secure parking
- Pet friendly
- Uncapped WiFi
- 3-5 minutes' walk from shops and restaurants
- 5 minutes' walk from Zamani Grill - Home to the Smallest Bar on the Longest Wine Route in the World
- 10-30 minutes' walk from wineries

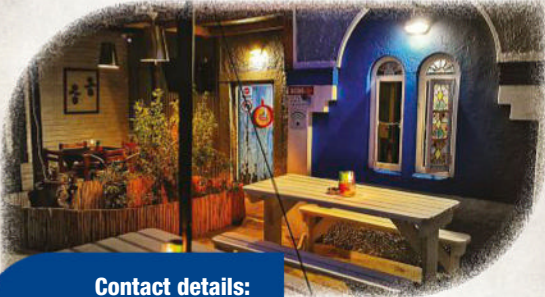
   **083 261 8478**



"Home to The Smallest Bar"
CALITZDORP

ZAMANI GRILL

An intimate Klein Karoo restaurant with a big heart and generous food portions. Being the home to the "Smallest Bar on Route 62" with seated capacity of 6-8 people when cramped, makes us a favourite stop for tourists and bikers exploring Route 62 and the Klein Karoo.



Contact details:
0838819334
(also on WhatsApp)
zamanigrillsb@outlook.com

Operating hours:
Monday-Friday: 12h00-24h00
(Kitchen closes at 21h00)
Saturday: 10h00-24h00
(Kitchen is open from 12h00-21h00)
Sunday: CLOSED



COLESBERG



Enjoy true Karoo hospitality in the centre of South Africa.

The Horse and Mill is a perfect stop-over between Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Johannesburg and Durban. It is situated in the centre of Colesberg on a quiet one-way street parallel to the main road and is within walking distance of five local restaurants with good Karoo cuisine.

Horse and Mill Guesthouse was originally established in 1995 and consists of four houses that have 16 rooms and units, each one with their entrance.

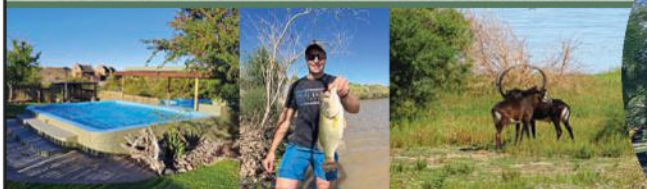


All rooms with air-conditioner, DStv bouquet and WiFi. Most of the rooms are powered by solar energy, so no loadshedding.

Tel: 051 753 0406 | 072 272 7247
Email: info@horseandmillguesthouse.co.za | horseandmillcb@gmail.com
www.horseandmillguesthouse.co.za

TERI-LEMVELI LODGE

THE LODGE IS LOCATED IN THE HEART OF THE KAROO WITH THE NIEUVELD MOUNTAIN RANGE AS BACKDROP. We are situated on the N1, South East of Beaufort West, and only 15 km out of town. The lodge is easily accessible, 500m from the N1 and an ideal base from which to explore the Central Karoo.



This 250-ha malaria free farm is privately owned and can accommodate 42 guests in the self-catering chalets and 22 guests in the self-catering Stable Rooms. The view from the chalets over the beautiful Stolsriver Dam will give you some peace of mind and you can watch how wild animals and birds drink water while you can enjoy the beautiful Karoo sunset.

You can buy real Karoo Lamb braai packs, wood, firelighters, salads etc., from our little Shop, as well as some of South Africa's best wines, beautiful curios and logo branded items like caps, golf-shirts, and clothing.

CONTACT

Tel.: 081 876 1381

E-mail: reservations@terilemvelilodge.co.za

Web: www.terilemvelilodge.co.za

- Come and sit down for a delicious Karoo Breakfast.
- Fully licensed venue which can accommodate up to 60 people.
- A marquee tent is available on request.
- Also available for conferences, birthday parties, year-end functions and shows.
- A back-up generator is used in times of Loadshedding.

Set amidst a working farm, Avondrust Farm Stay Guest Houses offer a tranquil, relaxed and no-fuss atmosphere. Choose any one of our four homes for the perfect family getaway...

Avondrust
- FARM STAY -

Angeliersbosch Guest House - Prince Albert
3 Double bedrooms. Kitchen, lounge with fireplace and dining area. Child friendly. Braai facilities.

Môreson Guest House - Klaarstroom
4 Double bedrooms. 3 Bathrooms. Kitchens. Outside dining. Pool. Braai facilities. Spacious enclosed garden. No pets. Child friendly.

Avondrust Guest House - Klaarstroom
The perfect 'home-away-from-home'. 6 Double bedrooms (all en-suite). Wheel-chair friendly. No children under the age of 6 years old. Pool.

Ebeneser Cottage - Klaarstroom
2 Double bedrooms. Kitchen, lounge and dining room. Braai facilities. Children and pet friendly.

Enjoy hiking, fishing and superb MTB trails.

Avondrust

Môreson

Contact us
Michelle Klue
0027 (82) 890 1940
michelleklue@gmail.com

www.avondrust-farmstay.co.za

LANGFONTEIN WESTBROOK
1880
farm cottages

Historic Karoo farm situated 50 km from Graaff-Reinet in the security-controlled Camdeboo Conservancy.

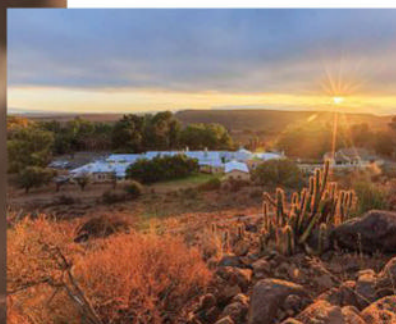
Luxury self-catering in restored farmsteads. Each cottage has a fireplace, braai facilities, spacious bedrooms with white linen and patios with beautiful views of the Karoo.

Contact: 0827819015 • Email: langfontein@lantic.net
www.langfonteinfarm.co.za @langfontein



For any inquiries
call: +27 (0) 53 621 1912
email: info@meltonwold.co.za

Visit our website
www.meltonwold.co.za



MELTON WOLD IS AN OASIS IN THE HEART OF THE KAROO.

Come enjoy Karoo hospitality at its best on an historic farm where time seems to stand still.

We are a working game and sheep farm, situated on the R63 between Victoria West and Loxton. Accommodation is provided in a congenial 1889 farmhouse which has been enlarged over the years. Melton Wold is the oldest guest farm in South Africa – we first opened to guests in 1935.

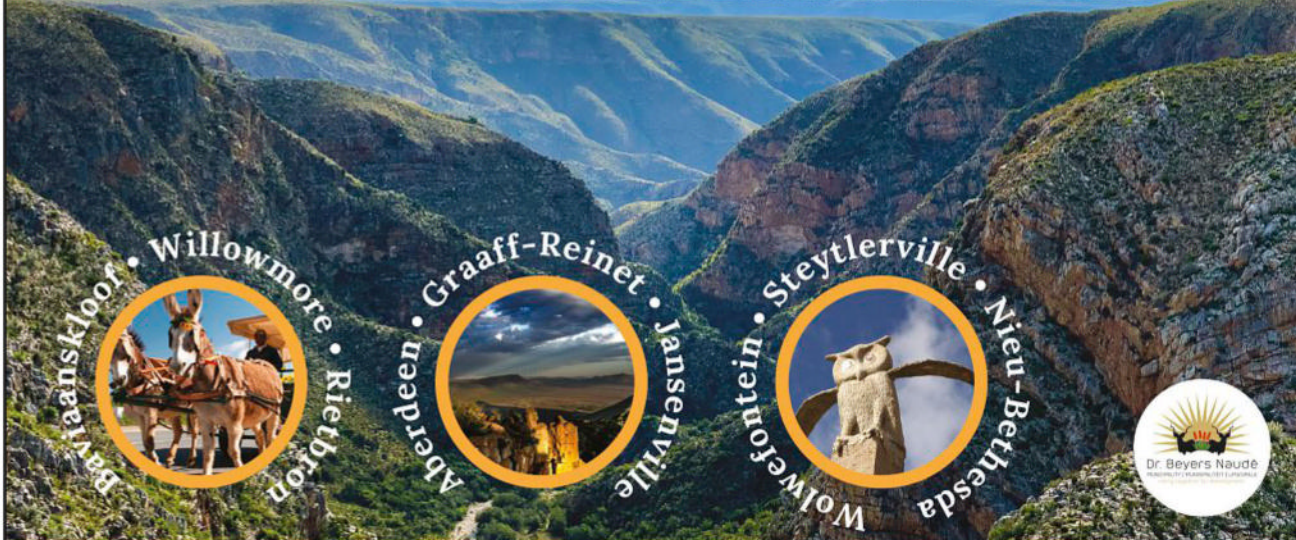
Perfect venue for: family holidays, weddings, conferences and big get-togethers. Melton Wold produces most of its own vegetables, bakes its own brown bread and makes its own preserves, as well as all the meat and venison coming from the farm itself, which all form the foundation of our renowned cuisine. We spoil you every morning with a wakeup call, serving coffee or tea in your room. Whilst the children enjoy the activities on the farm, the parents can relax in our fully licensed ladies bar, The Deer and Pheasant.

The caravan park opened in 2006. We have 10 stands on grass. Each stand has its own water tap, braai and electricity point.



EXPLORE THE BEAUTY OF THE KAROO

CIRCLE ROUTE FROM BAVIAANS TO BETHESDA



www.baviaans.co.za

www.graaffreinet.co.za

084 511 6806





BAVIAANSKLOOFTOURISM.CO.ZA

THE DROUGHT IS OVER!
Come and see the Baviaanskloof now.
 The very best place to get away from it all
 and to be in nature.

- Accommodation
- Camping
- Hiking
- Mountain biking
- Rock climbing

Jana Meyer 079 894 8952 (WhatsApp only)
 Ankie Smith 082 879 5023 (WhatsApp only)



RESTAURANT • SHOP • GIFTS
PET FRIENDLY • GREAT FOOD
DRINKS • COFFEE •
MILKSHAKES

TEL: 044 9231 070 WHATSAPP: 082 741 3888

W I L L O W M O R E
 EASTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA

ZAAÿMAN'S GARAGE
WILLOWMORE

**LAST STOP FOR FUEL
 BEFORE BAVIAANSKLOOF!**

ENGEN
 With us you are Number One

- ✓ Puncture repairs
- ✓ Tyre Sales
- ✓ Breakdown Service
- ✓ Workshop
- ✓ Refreshments

OPEN
 24 hours / 7 days
 a week!

Contact:
 044 923 1007
 After Hours: 083 420 5434
 zaaymansgarage@gmail.com

www.willowmoreinfo.co.za

WILLOWMORE

Finchley Farm Cottages

Where "Remote is the new luxury"

2,5km outside the village ■
 Self-catering cottages ■
 En suite rooms ■
 Bed & breakfast ■
 Camping ■
 Trip up magnificent ■
 Aasvoëlberg ■

Cell: 0827 835 389
www.finchleyfarm.co.za
Email: finchleyfarm@baviaans.co.za

**OPEN 7 DAYS
OF THE WEEK**



KAPOET



KAPOET - WILLOWMORE

**Homemade meals
& old
family recipes.**
Pies, roosterkoek,
filled pancakes,
light meals, cakes,
tarts, biltong
and droëwors.



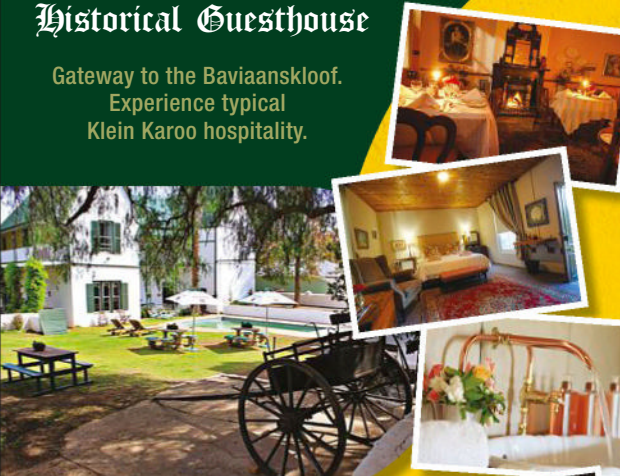
Louretta Lötter
082 781 2426
lourettal@vodamail.co.za

WILLOWMORE

The Willow

Historical Guesthouse

Gateway to the Baviaanskloof.
Experience typical
Klein Karoo hospitality.



El-Anne and Derek Smith
Tel: 044 923 1574
Cell: 076 083 6357
E-mail: thewillow@telkomsa.net
www.thewillowguesthouse.co.za



ON SALE NOW

ORDER NOW!

The 2023 edition of *go! Wild Places* is available now. Buy your copy online at media24shop.com. EFT and credit card options are available. For enquiries, e-mail yumna.tofey@media24.com or call 021 406 2205. Digital edition available from zinio.com and magzter.com.

go!
Wild Places 2023
YOUR GUIDE TO SOUTH AFRICA'S RESERVES AND PARKS

KOGELBERG
Where to hike, swim and
hide out in the fynbos

KRUGER
The five wildest activities
in SA's favourite reserve

AUGRABIES
When the flood comes

PLUS

- Kgalagadi • Botsalano • Addo • West Coast • Dinokeng • Oribi Gorge • Weenen
- Vernon Crookes • Spioenkop • Lake Eland • Umlalazi • Zingela Safaris • Molopo
- Blyde River Canyon • Mapungubwe • Namaqua • uKhahlamba Drakensberg
- Biebel • Mokala • Pilanesberg • Grootvadersbosch • Hluhluwe-Imfolozi • Marakele
- Mountain Zebra • Cedarberg • Baviaanskloof • Witand • Welkberg • Golden Gate
- Bloubaai • Marico • Waterberg • Tankwa Karoo • Bontebok • Garden Route – and more!

There's a kudu
on my stoep!

SA R125
NS1925 (Pretoria)



Game-rich northern Botswana!



DATES AND RATES

21 – 31 March 2024

R22 650 per adult;
50 % per child under 10

Duration: 11 days, 10 nights

Start: Khama Rhino Sanctuary

End: Kasane

WHAT WE SUPPLY

- Tented accommodation
- Specialist guide
- Two-way radios in all vehicles
- Three meals per day
- Entry fees to all parks and activities
- 4x4 assistance if required

WHAT YOU NEED TO BRING

- Your own vehicle – a 4x4 is essential (fuel is for your own account)
- Your own travel insurance
- Cool drinks, alcoholic drinks and snacks
- Personal items such as medication, sunblock, binoculars, camera etc.
- A camping chair each

Our latest adventure into Botswana introduces a few new destinations while keeping some firm favourites. Explore this country with Bhejane on the journey of a lifetime and discover some of Africa's wildest places.

Our northern Botswana tour begins at the community-based Khama Rhino Sanctuary in central Botswana, where we spend our first night before moving on to the spectacular Kubu Island, a granite rock outcrop on the Makgadikgadi Pans, for a night under the stars. The next morning after enjoying coffee and rusks against a backdrop of the iconic baobabs, we head north along the edge of the empty salt pans, testing our 4x4 driving on the sandy terrain.

We have a light picnic lunch en route to our next campsite. We will spend two days on the banks of the Boteti River, 30 km from Maun. There will be an opportunity to do a flight over the Okavango Delta (own expense), explore the local markets or simply chill in camp before a late afternoon cruise on the Boteti River.

Then we continue to the Khwai River, north of Moremi, for three days of camping. The area is renowned for prolific game, beautiful scenery and magnificent birdlife. Next on the itinerary is Chobe National Park, where there are excellent game-viewing opportunities. It's one of the best places to see elephants, as well as lions, leopards, hyenas and wild dogs. (A mokoro

experience is included in the tour package.)

Leaving Khwai behind, we traverse the Savuti section of Chobe National Park to our camp on the Chobe floodplain, close to Ngoma in northern Botswana. Our transit through the park is yet another chance to see game.

By the time we arrive at our camp in the late afternoon, the Bhejane team has dinner on the fire, so the only thing left is to wash off the Savuti dust before enjoying a sundowner.

Go on a self-drive tour along the Chobe River and explore at your own pace. The area is known for its large herds of elephant and buffalo. Our camp is situated close to the Ngoma entrance to Chobe National Park, so you can easily do a drive along the riverfront and floodplains in the park – good places for birdwatching and game.

And finally, we'll spend two nights on the Chobe near Kasane. There are no fences between the park and the town so it's quite common to see wildlife wandering through town!

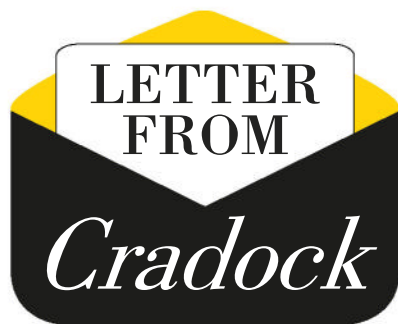
A visit to Chobe would not be complete without a sunset cruise on the river, watching the animals make their way to the water. What a fitting way to round off the adventure.

PLEASE NOTE: YOU WILL NEED A 4X4 FOR THIS TOUR DUE TO THE VERY SANDY TERRAIN.
(TRAVELLING TIMES PROVIDED ARE APPROXIMATE AND MAY VARY DUE TO THE STATE OF THE ROADS.)



Contact ☎ bookings@bhejane.com or call ☎ 082 724 0442 for a complete itinerary and a list of tour dates.





Cradock is called Nxuba these days,
but despite changing times,
Clinton V. du Plessis still holds fast to
this part of the Eastern Cape Karoo.

In winter, the cold creeps into your bones. In summer, the heat can leave you a sweaty mess, like you're about to slip out of your skin. There are the drought years, when you wrestle with your god like a drunken man in a bar; and when it rains you stand with your hat in your hand and be thankful.

This is a landscape of extremes – and it is my home.

There are other extremes too, like the disparity between the few who have so much, and the many who have so little. There's the uncomfortable past and its ghosts, and the unsure hallucinations of whatever the future may hold.

I was born in 1963, in the village of Cookhouse, south of Cradock. I lived in Johannesburg for a while, working as an accountant, but in 2006 I moved back to the Karoo. Not because I had to, because I wanted to. On my own terms. The rat race was replaced by life at a more mindful pace. No traffic to get excited about. Hijacking was just a word you heard on the news.

To get to grips with a place like Cradock, you must look at it from different perspectives. Somewhere in between, you'll find its peaceful silences: its own space.

From the plateau in nearby Mountain Zebra National Park, you can gaze into the hazy expanse and get a sense of eternity. Or cast your eye up the steep hillside on the farm Buffelshoek, to where writer Olive Schreiner's lonely sarcophagus stands on a mountaintop. Maybe the memory of this formidable destroyer of stereotypes (she was a letter writer of renown, too, oliveschreiner.org) will offer some hope, something to hold on to.

Sometimes, for fun, I imagine Olive racing a Harley-Davidson down a deserted Calata Street, Cradock's main drag, on a Sunday afternoon. Or I imagine that Waldo (a character from her famous book, *The Story of an African Farm*) is a homeless car guard ushering cars into parking spots in front of the KFC, or washing the giant windcreens of one of the endless iron-ore trucks that rattle through town.

There are times when I feel as if Cradock – and the Karoo, and the entire country – is like a big marble, a *ghoen* as we say in Afrikaans, that has lost its lustre. There's always some threat looming just over the horizon, like fracking, the spectre of which keeps haunting the Karoo despite opposition from many sides.

Other shadows also linger, wraithlike: those who have passed through here, and those who took their first breath in this town. The Cradock Four, the activist Neville Alexander, the writers Karel Schoeman and Richard Rive...

But there are also times when Cradock and the Karoo shine like that prized marble, kept safe and treasured in an old linen tobacco bag. It remains a source of inspiration to artists, poets and dreamers. Not always, but sometimes.

Sometimes, you can still be whisked away on its promise, without any cynicism. That's when you can almost grasp its beauty.

As a farewell, here is my poem, "The landscape of the body":

*You are the deserted main road of Aberdeen
long after midnight, with moonlight and streetlamp
bravely straining against the dark
I speed past, I take in too little
I must learn to appreciate you more
do you remember, the toll of the church bells
on a Sunday morning in Somerset East
outside the Dutch Reformed church?*

*We broke bread, like glass, in Nieu-Bethesda
with its owls and pyramids, camels and
Miss Martin's bright shadow
in her republic where the gaze is locked to the east.*

*We bottled the silences, wrapped them in soft cloth,
packed them carefully in the boot
at Klipplaat we waited in vain on a train,
loaded with nostalgia and wool and mohair and passengers,
but now just a junction to nowhere,*

*We are threaded like a growth upon this place
a spreading, red thicket, aloe up on the ridge.*

*I carry your water and sustenance
abba, that's how we'll journey, sometimes
we get lost in the pain and sadness of this land,
and yet, we return, bloodied and bruised,
we follow the tracks again, blindly,
uncertainly, towards the future.*

Follow Clinton V. du Plessis on Facebook to read more of his writing
or buy his books from amacolouredslowguns@gmail.com

SHOP \ MEDIA 24



COSY AT HOME WITH ALL YOUR FAVOURITE PUBLICATIONS

At the M24 Shop you'll find all our printed publications in one convenient place

media24shop.com

**R60
OFF**

your order
of R150
or more!

SHOP \ MEDIA 24

*Offer valid until 31 December 2023

BESTEL IN 3 MAKLIKE STAPPE:

1.

media24shop.com.
Browse the
collection & make
your selection.

2.

Add to cart and use
code: **#SPRING** upon
checkout for **R60 off**
your order

3.

Your order will
be on the way
to your door!



BERLUDA

OUDTSHOORN • SOUTH AFRICA

On a typical Klein Karoo farm at the foot of the mighty Swartberg Mountains, you will find the 11th-generation Berluda Guest Farm. Experience the Cango Valley and reside in one of our luxurious double rooms or self-catering family cottages. We offer exciting tours to the Meerkat family in our private game reserve and of our working ostrich farm and hatchery. Our in-house restaurant will spoil you with hearty and traditional cuisine, and you will enjoy the best of service and Berluda hospitality.

