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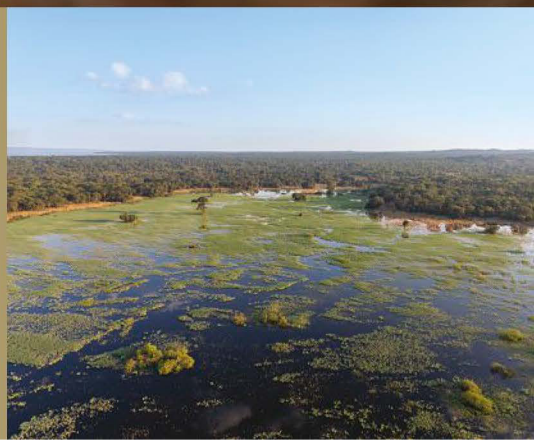
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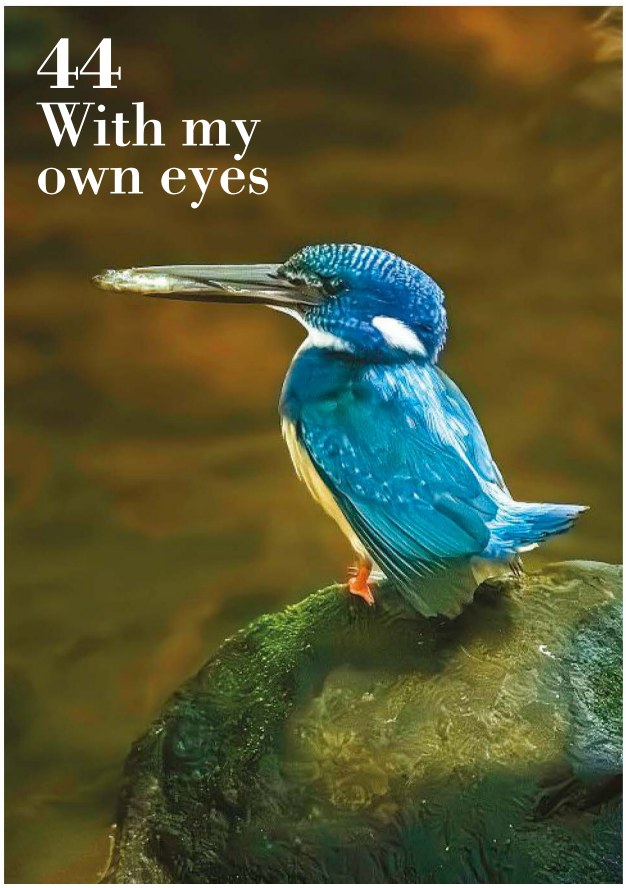


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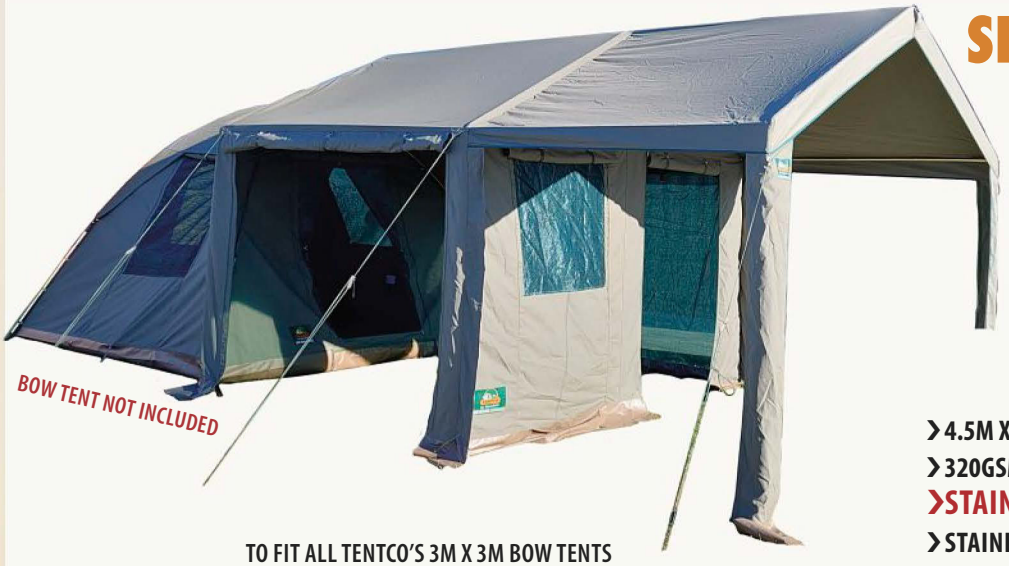
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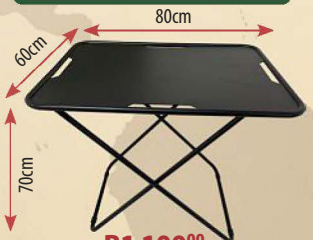


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RONEL STEYN

The wheels are rolling

I'm convinced that time accelerates as you get older. (There must be a mathematical equation somewhere that explains it.) How is it possible that a school day can feel like an eternity when you're 10 years old, but the first three months of 2025 have already disappeared down the wormhole? *How is it even 2025 already?*

What speeds things up even more in our world is the magazine production schedule, which already stretches into 2026. There's so much to look forward to, but also so much to do. And that's excellent news – not just for us, but also for you, our loyal readers.

(By the way – according to the latest statistics from the Publisher Research Council – the 382 000 people who read *go!* and our Afrikaans sister mag *Weg* are some of the best-educated and affluent magazine readers in the country. We're honoured that you want to travel this road with us!)

Back to that schedule... We're currently working on stories for the issues that appear on shelf every two months, and we're busy with no fewer than *five* special issues.

Sophia van Taak is back from her travels in Namibia with a laptop full of words and pictures that will become our ever-popular annual Namibia guide (on sale from 11 April). Our West Coast and Namaqualand travel guide sold so well last year that we're doing another one, which will be on shelf from 6 June – in time for the flower season. We've also decided to do a brand-new Kruger guide. The last one was published back in 2021, when it won the Media24 award for Best Special Edition. Esma Marnewick spent weeks in the park doing research and she's convinced the new guide (on sale from 4 July) will be the best one we've ever produced.

We're also publishing another Karoo guide. Mainly because you guys (and girls) loved the first ones, and also because there's a lot of Karoo and we've only just scratched the surface of what this magical region has to offer travellers. The 2025 guide will be on sale from 29 August.

As I write this, Toast Coetzer is busy driving thousands of kilometres through Botswana and Zambia (he says he hasn't seen it so wet and green in a long time) for our ever-popular Botswana guide, which will be on shelf from 24 October; and my own Suzuki Jimny is packed and ready for the sandy jeep tracks of Mabuasehube on the Botswanan side of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

The wheels are rolling... Come roll along!

DON'T MISS OUR NEXT ISSUE!
The June/July magazine will be on sale at your retailer from 23 May 2025.

Pierre

PIERRE STEYN
PSteyn@media24.com

BEHIND THE SCENES

Web editor **Desiree Hartney** has visited her sister in South Korea on two occasions. Read about her impressions of the country on page 129.



What surprised you? The cold! I travelled in December the first time – the middle of their winter. My sister Gaynor has been teaching English in Munsan for three years; the town is about an hour by train from the capital of Seoul. One day it got down to -12 °C and it snowed often. The streets are amazingly clean and well maintained for such a densely populated country. Seoul has twice as many people as Cape Town!

What did you like? Public transport runs on time and you can travel to almost anywhere in the country by bus or train. The Koreans also love their coffee; you can find a coffee shop on almost every corner – and they're always packed.

Any highlights? The way that Gyeongbokgung Palace – the home of the royal family built in the 14th century, with red-and-green walls and pagodas – stands out against the grey skyscrapers of Seoul… And when you walk around on the cobblestones, you can feel they were laid by hand.

I also loved the view from Namsan Tower, an observatory built on one of the highest hills in Seoul. From the top you have a view of the entire city.

How does Korea differ from South Africa? They don't seem to depend on tourism as much as we do, and people seem less friendly. In South Africa we take very good care of our tourists, but in Korea the locals couldn't care less.

How's the food? It's first class. My favourites were *kimchi-jjigae* (a stew-like dish with kimchi, onions and tofu), *bulgogi* (meat in a delicious marinade) and *tteokbokki* (rice cakes similar to gnocchi, in a red sauce with a bit of a bite).

Living space is limited so people prefer to eat out or get takeaways instead of cooking in their small kitchens. The street stalls sell everything from *gimbap* (sushi rice with different fillings) to *twigim* (deep-fried vegetables in a batter, almost like tempura).

Is it an affordable destination? No, everything is expensive! You pay a lot for fresh meat, fruit and vegetables, but they're of a high quality.

Going out to eat is also pricey. Budget for at least R200 per person, but convenience foods are more affordable – a *gimbap* roll costs about R40.

What's always in your travel bag? Hand sanitizer, hand cream, lip balm, good headphones and a USB cable so I can charge my phone on the go.

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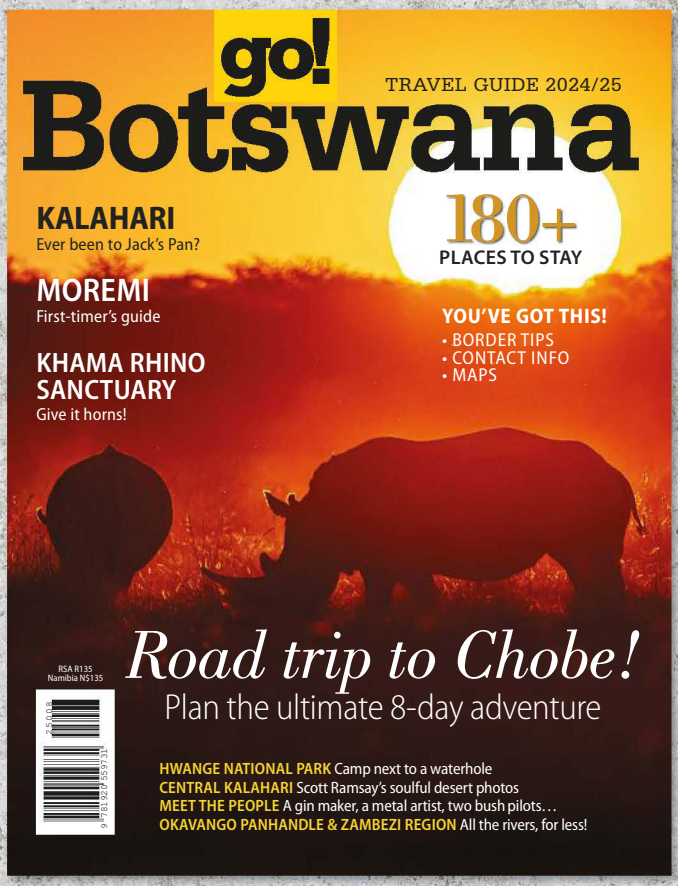
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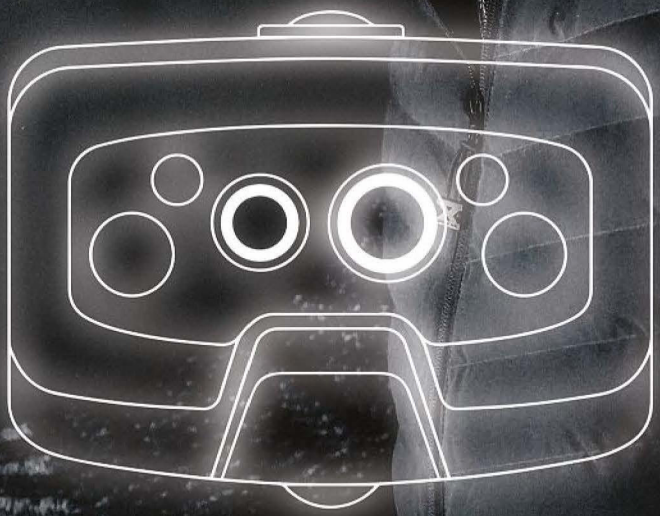
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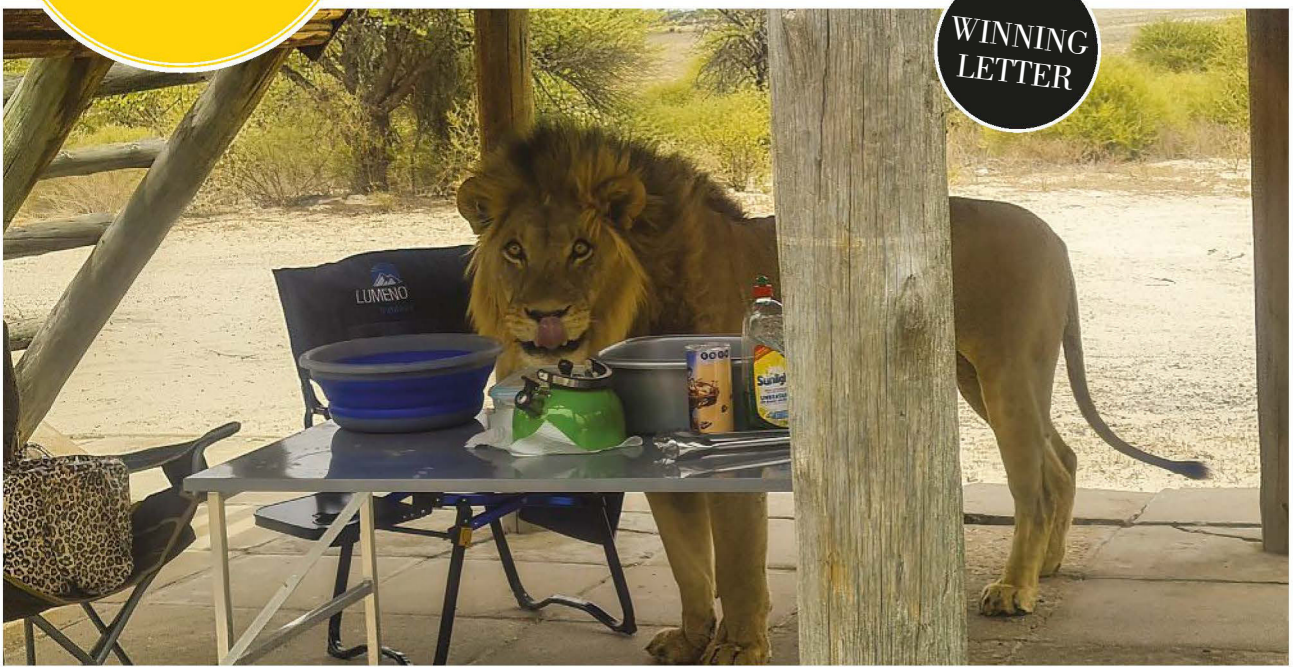
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LETTERS

Where have you been? What have you seen?
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COMPILED BY **MARTINETTE LOUW**



Mabuasehube magic

My husband Eben and I always dreamt of visiting the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park to see lions. In December 2024, we got our chance. We camped at Khiding 1 in the Mabuasehube section of the park – we were really excited to sleep in our rooftop tent with no fences around us.

Early one morning, while having coffee and rusks under the A-frame awning, we heard a lion roar. When we heard another lion answer, we quickly grabbed our cellphones and got into the Land Cruiser – just in time to see two lions arrive at our camp.

We took photo after photo. Time passed but we knew there was nothing we could do – we didn't want to disturb them. After a while my husband fell asleep, but I watched the lions the whole time. They were very calm and mostly lay about sleeping.

Another vehicle arrived at 3.30 pm and the lions finally left. We could pack up our stuff and depart for our next overnight spot, Mpayathutlwa 2. In the end, we spent nine hours trapped in our vehicle, but luckily we had a camping fridge with snacks on the back seat. And the close encounter with the lions made the time fly by!

LIZA COETZEE, Benoni



WRITE TO US & WIN!



Liza wins a Zartek ZA-474 spotlight worth R1 899. This rechargeable light features three globes and produces a powerful 4 000-lumen focused beam, reaching up to 800 m. It's ergonomically designed with a rubberised handle and a lightweight casing. There are four brightness modes and the light has a built-in high-capacity 6 600 mAH battery. Also included: USB adaptor and a detachable red lens. **zartek.co.za**

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SPEAK TO US

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The perfect balance

My in-laws like to holiday at Tugela River Mouth South Bank on the KZN North Coast. It's a special place with only a few houses, beautiful beaches and a magical forest.

The Tugela River falls off the edge of the Amphitheatre in the Drakensberg and gathers momentum on its way to the Indian Ocean. The river washes interesting things onto the beach, often in December when there has been lots of rain inland.

This year we were fascinated by this huge tree trunk that washed onto the rocks and formed the perfect arch. My sister-in-law, Sarah, is a ballet dancer – she climbed onto the tree trunk to pose. My husband Dylan took the photo.

ANRI BREWER, Pretoria



Family portrait

During a trip to the Kruger Park in early January, we stayed at Olifants rest camp. We went for a game drive on this particular morning and just before we got to the junction of the S92 and the road that goes over the Balule low-water bridge, we found this warthog mom feeding her piglets.

I had a split second to grab my camera, as I knew they'd scamper if disturbed. I managed two shots before they stopped feeding and stood up from mom to see what was going on.

STU BOWIE, Centurion

Bedraggled

We visited the Kruger Park in December 2024, luckily just before some really heavy rains started. This photo is my favourite from our holiday – I took it on the Rabelais Loop near Orpen rest camp. The jackal looked so miserable. I just wanted to dry it off and take it home!

ANNELIZE BAARD, Johannesburg





Glutton for punishment

The Kruger Park is such a wonderful place. We spent time in the park in September 2024 – my wife Annemarie and I travelled with my parents, Johnny and Betsie.

Late one afternoon, on our way back to Lower Sabie, we came across a remarkable scene: A lilac-breasted roller sat in the middle of the tar road with a lizard, which was desperately fighting for its life. After a while the roller grabbed the lizard and flew to a nearby tree. There, the bird tossed the lizard into the air repeatedly until it was positioned with its tail in the air.

Then the struggle began: The roller tried to gulp down the lizard for close to 10 minutes, but clearly it had misjudged the size of its prey!

Unfortunately we had to leave to make it back to camp in time, but the roller was so determined I'm sure it managed to eat its meal.

SYBRAND LE ROUX, Gqeberha



Gate crashers

My partner Glenda has a share in a game farm in Mashatu, Botswana. One evening during our last visit to the farm, we arrived at our private sunset spot on a koppie to find that these uninvited guests had joined us for sundowners!

The mother and her cubs were blissfully basking in the last rays of the day. We enjoyed their company for about 40 minutes until she left the cubs alone with us. After another 10 minutes the cubs moved out of sight, probably to their den for the night.

According to Wim Vorster, a leopard and photography expert based at Mashatu, the leopard is known as the Motswiri female, and the cubs were about eight weeks old.

SIMON PORTEOUS, Randburg



Anything for a bite

I'm addicted to the Kruger Park – seriously – and try to visit once a year. I recently stayed at Ngwenya Lodge near Komatipoort and did day trips into the park. I took this photo of a saddle-billed stork from the bridge over the Crocodile River. The stork was hunting and scrambled to catch a fish. I really enjoyed the sighting – these birds are usually very poised and still.

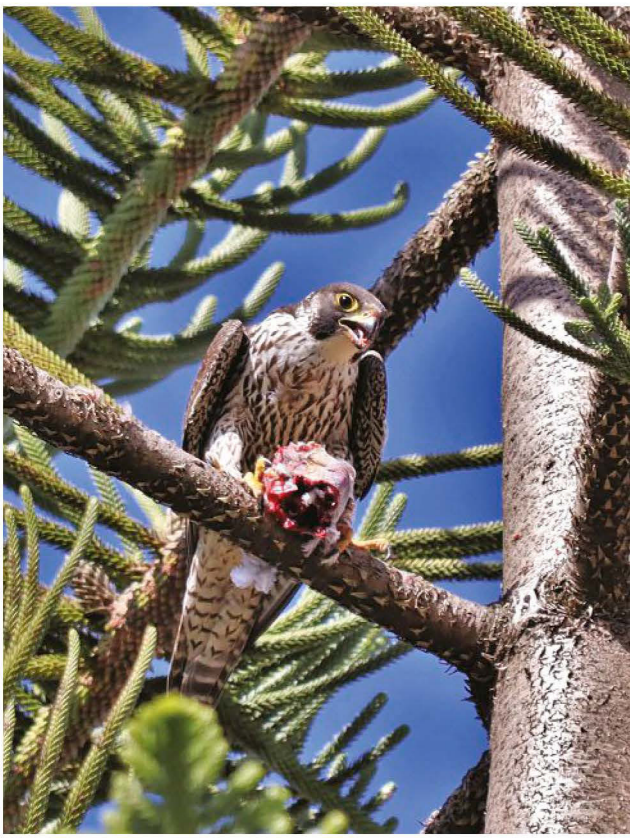
SANTA HEUNIS, Nigel

Hi, neighbour!

Peregrine falcons often visit us at our home in Sandbaai – they perch in the Norfolk Island pine in our neighbour's garden. I like to watch them from our balcony. I took this photo late one afternoon in November 2022 – the sun caught the raptor and its prey perfectly.

My husband Tierck and I are keen birders. We've joined our local birding club in the Overberg – once the birding bug bites, you can't get rid of it!

JEANETTA HOEKSTRA, Sandbaai





Sweet treat? Yes, please!

I never thought the early spring flowers of a velvet raisin bush could be so delicious… In August last year, I visited Sabie Park – a private nature reserve next to the Kruger – and watched as this zebra nibbled the yellow flowers. The zebra was soon followed by nyalas and all kinds of birds. I got the impression that the animals loved the sweet flowers.

HENNIE VAN DEVENTER, Melkbosstrand



Caught in the act

I spent some time in the Kruger Park a few years ago. One day, on one of the dirt roads near Satara, I saw this python in a tree – it had caught a roller. The poor bird struggled to free itself, but couldn't.

I hoped the snake would eat the bird, but it must have been aware of our presence because it waited until we'd driven off. I've seen snakes in trees before, but never with a catch.

LOUIS HAARHOFF, Vanderbijlpark



More meerkats at Mata-Mata

I loved the letter "Meerkat cuteness" in issue #196 – sent in by Kate Morris from Somerset West. She wrote about a meerkat mom and her babies in the campsite at Mata-Mata in the Kgalagadi.

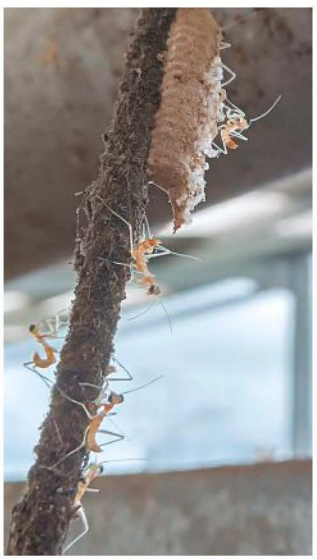
We camped there during the September school holidays and I can confirm: The meerkats there are very cute! They were all healthy and happy and very curious – they followed my two young daughters around and would often sit upright to scan the sky for danger.

ANÈL ACKERMAN, Bloemfontein

Congrats on the babies!

I took this photo one morning while working on a farm near Mooi River in KZN. While feeding the heifers, I noticed something very small drop from a rope to the main feeding line. I looked up and saw these baby praying mantises hatching. There were about 30 or 40 already out. When I went back a bit later, all the babies had gone and only the egg capsule they'd hatched from remained.

BONNIE PHIPPS, Mooi River





Don't monitor my diet…

I photographed this crocodile in the Chobe River from the bar at Chobe Safari Lodge in Kasane, Botswana. It really struggled to gulp down a monitor lizard. I was camping at the lodge – my stand was about 10 m from the water. The same crocodile would lie on the riverbank next to the bar by day and come to watch me braaiing at night – it seemed to really like the smell of chicken…

JOHAN DEYSEL, George

Q&A

Every month our experts answer your questions about birds, bugs and beasts. Send your photos and queries to editor@gomag.co.za



Back up!

EDDIE COOMBES from Sandton writes: I recently saw this zebra in the Dinokeng Game Reserve. The deep curve of the animal's back caught my attention, and it also appeared to have a slightly longer body than the other zebras. Otherwise, the zebra looked in good shape, ate normally and was part of a small herd. Can you tell me more about this condition?

Wildlife expert LD VAN ESSEN says: This zebra has something called swayback colloquially – a vet would call it equine lordosis.

The condition is characterised by a failure of the ligament support structures along the length of the back. When these ligaments are weakened, stretched or compromised, the spine can bend towards the ground. There are five main causes of equine lordosis: genetics, age, build, pregnancy and excessive strain on the back at an early age.

Swayback in zebras and horses should not be confused with swayback in sheep and goats. In these animals, "swayback" refers to enzootic ataxia, a neurological disease in young animals caused by a copper deficiency in foetal and early post-natal development.

Why does this zebra mare have swayback? It's hard to say, but it could be attributed to age and/or multiple pregnancies with big foals. She seems to be in good health otherwise, and has adapted to her condition.



A band of beetles

PIETER BROERE from Pretoria writes: I found these beetles on a leadwood tree in my garden. They stayed there for a few weeks – it looked like they were drinking sap from a wound on the tree. What kind of beetles are they, and is it normal for different species to congregate like this?

Entomologist DUNCAN MACFADYEN says: How spectacular! There are five different species of fruit and flower chafers in this photo – they all belong to a group of scarab beetles from the subfamily *Cetoniinae*. It's common for different species of sap-feeding beetles, as well as certain species of butterfly, to congregate at a suitable feeding site.

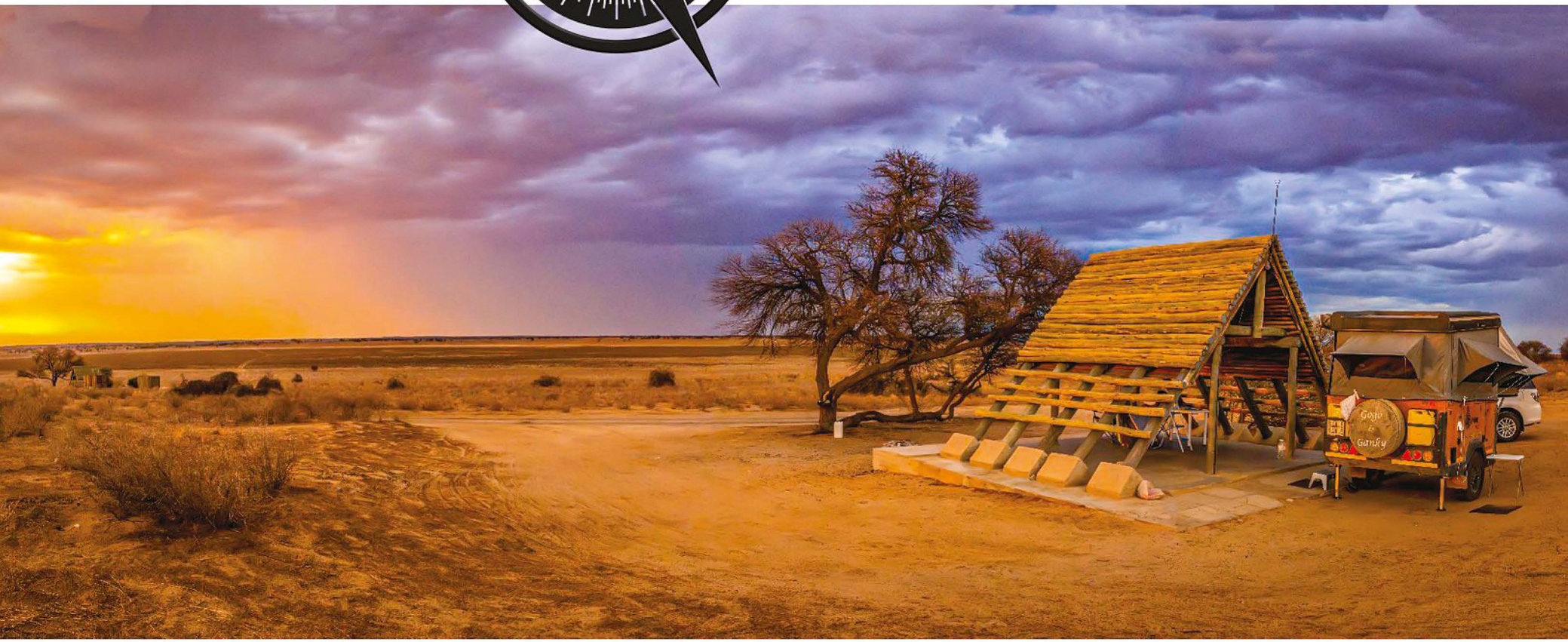
The largest is the goliath beetle – it has a body length of around 55 mm and is white with irregular black markings. It's the largest fruit chafer in the region. The two Derby's flower beetles are metallic green with an ochre sheen and white stripes on the pronotum and wing covers. There's also a small goliath beetle (black body with yellow polka dots and golden wings); a glossy black mirror chafer; and two yellow-belted fruit chafers (one is in the fork of the tree). The latter is a lightly flat, robust beetle with a yellow colour on the ventral side of the body and dark brown on the dorsal surface. The body is broken by yellow spots and a transverse yellow line across the rear of the forewings.

These species are all diurnal and the adults primarily feed on tree sap and fruit. The adults have been recorded on sap flows of leadwood, velvet bush willow, large-fruited bushwillow and buffalo thorn. They are, however, also readily attracted to fermenting fruit and have been found on the flowers of thorn tree species.

The adult males of these various species sometimes aggressively defend the sap flows from other males. They're great flyers and can hover above and land on sap, flowers or fruit. When threatened by predators, they escape by either performing a rush take-off, or by falling toward the ground and then flying before impact.

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The R61 dissects the Eastern Cape, connecting Karoo towns like Cradock (Nxuba) and Graaff-Reinet with subtropical Port St Johns on the coast.

I took this photograph late one afternoon west of Cradock, towards Wapadsberg Pass. There are several game farms along this stretch of road and if you drive slowly, you'll see anything from plains game like springbok and blesbok to rare antelope like sable and roan.

PICTURE **TOAST COETZER**

IN BRIEF

COMPILED BY **VANIA JOOSTE**



Greet a rare quagga

Hey, Capetonians, you don't have to go to the bush to see wildebeest, red hartebeest, bontebok and eland – you can see them all, and a herd of Nguni cattle, on an environmental tour of Vergelegen Nature Reserve, a 19 km² protected area on Vergelegen Wine Estate near Somerset West.

You can also see a rare Rau quagga – a selectively bred variant of the plains zebra that closely resembles the extinct quagga, which once lived in South Africa and was hunted to extinction in the late 19th century. This modern quagga is named after Reinhold Rau, a conservationist who launched the Quagga Project in 1987 to bring it back from annihilation. Recently, in 2022, a Rau stallion, six mares and a foal were brought to the reserve. Four foals have since been born, says environmental expert Eben Olderwagen, who leads the tour.

Workers and volunteers have removed all alien vegetation in the reserve and restored a wetland. Thanks to these efforts, rare and endangered plant species like the *Lachenalia liliflora* (Cape hyacinth) and *Babiana villosula* have reappeared. The birds arrived, too: 170 species have been recorded. Some of these are seasonal migrants, like the grey-backed cisticola, which can only be seen in winter. Also look for the four pairs of resident blue cranes.

The tour takes about two hours and includes a wine tasting. It's also the only way you can explore the reserve – no self-guided visitors are allowed.

Vergelegen has beautiful gardens, a restaurant with a view of the mountains and a tea garden – there's enough here to make a day of it!

Cost: Reserve tour R750 per person.

More info: vergelegen.co.za



NIGHT WATCH

Now you see it, now you don't

People sometimes wonder whether the moon ever moves in front of the stars. Of course it does, but you don't often see it. When one heavenly body moves in front of another, as seen from a certain point, like earth for example, we call this event an occultation. An eclipse is also a type of occultation.

While the moon obscures a faint star every few hours, the brightest stars in the night sky are only occulted every 44 days on average. In 2025, there will be four lunar occultations of bright stars that will be visible across South Africa, and two of these events will take place in April and May respectively.

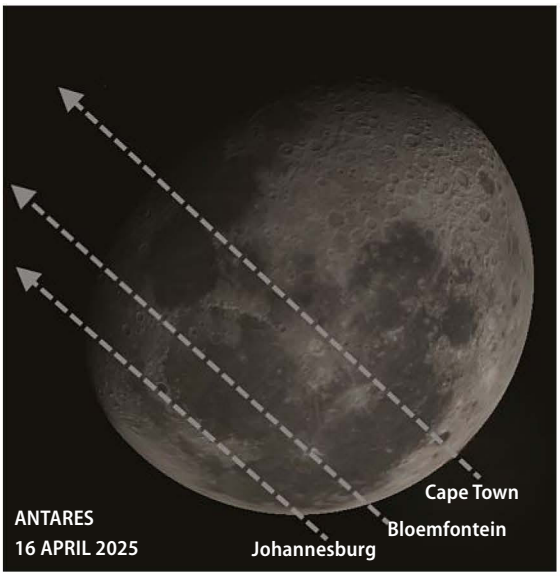
On 16 April, the moon will move in front of the brightest star in the Scorpion constellation – it's called Antares and it's the 15th brightest star in the night sky. The table below shows when the star will disappear and reappear from different locations, and the graphic shows the path the star will follow behind the moon from different locations. There are different paths because the moon is close enough to the earth for the parallax effect to take place; in other words, the path will differ depending on your location.

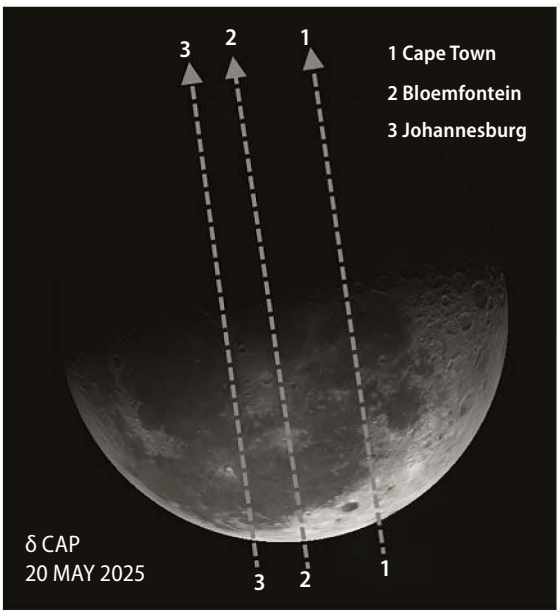
In both cases, the star will disappear on the bright side of the moon, which makes it more difficult to observe. Use a pair of binoculars or a small telescope. The reappearance will occur on the dark side of the moon and will be clearly visible.

Antares is a double star (two stars in close orbit to each other) and if you look very closely, you'll see that the occultation happens stepwise.

In the early morning hours of 20 May, there will be a lunar occultation of δ Cap, also known as Deneb Algedi. δ Cap is not as bright as Antares, but the moon will also be in its last quarter and not as bright.

– Willie Koorts





STELLARIUM.ORG

STAR	DATE	LOCATION	DISAPPEARANCE	REAPPEARANCE
ANTARES	16 APRIL	CAPE TOWN	23:09	00:19
		BLOEMFONTEIN	23:09	00:12
		JOHANNESBURG	23:11	00:03
δ CAP	20 MAY	CAPE TOWN	01:28	02:32
		BLOEMFONTEIN	01:30	02:41
		JOHANNESBURG	01:32	02:43

BIRD BRAIN

CHALLENGE **#4**

Do you know your birds?
Play along to test your knowledge!
Can you identify this species?

Clue: This hyperactive little bird is unique in both its classification and its name. Search for it in the mountains and the Karoo in summer, but check those big stinkwoods in your garden in winter.

Use your bird guide or app and see if you can figure it out.
Turn to page 115 for the answer.



DYLAN VASAPOLLI



GALLO/GETTYIMAGES.COM

DID YOU KNOW?

Koalas sleep up to 20 hours per day so their bodies have time to break down the toxins found in their staple food, eucalyptus leaves. The leaves don't provide much energy – another reason why these animals like to hit the snooze button.
Source: wwf.org.uk



Go, gannets, go!

The Cape gannet colony on Bird Island near Lambert's Bay broke a new population record in January this year – ornithologists counted 45 000 birds, the highest number in 19 years! The population has consistently been above 30 000 for the last five years and this latest census suggests that conservation measures are working.

There are indications that gannets from elsewhere are migrating here, which means conditions on the island are good for breeding. The island has lots of space, not many predators and enough food. There's also a team of experts to look after and protect the birds – they monitor diseases and deaths in the colony, and they keep an eye on predators like kelp gulls and mongooses. There are seals on the island, but a special barrier limits their access to the birds.

Entrance fee: R45 per adult; R25 per child; free with a Wild card.
Contact: 087 087 3951; capenature.co.za





GALLO/GETTYIMAGES.COM

iSimangaliso's marvellous mantas

Scientists have discovered feeding aggregations of oceanic manta rays in a marine protected area of iSimangaliso Wetland Park in KZN. The area has been protected for more than 50 years and nearly 90% of all recorded manta sightings in South Africa take place here. The park was recently named a Mission Blue Hope Spot and is now part of an organisation that looks after places that are critically important for ocean health.

Manta rays play an important role in the ocean, controlling plankton populations and keeping the nutrient balance in check. They can also be a part of the tourism industry, if encounters are managed correctly.

Mantas are endangered and listed on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Collaboration agreements between protected areas and different countries are key to their survival. In our case, it means a dialogue with Mozambique to the north, where these magnificent rays also congregate.

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CAPE LEOPARD TRUST

LEOPARD LOUNGE

Feline the love

Camera trap photos of leopards are always exciting, but every once in a while, our research team at the Cape Leopard Trust gets absolutely cracker images that give us goosebumps! This sequence from our 2024 Piketberg survey is a perfect example.

Leopards are solitary creatures that spend almost all their time roaming their home ranges alone. As a result, it's uncommon to capture more than one spotted cat in the same frame. When it does happen, it's mostly a female with cubs. Occasionally though, we get a lucky shot of a meeting between a male and a female…

Leopard mating is known to be an energetic, feisty and sometimes drawn-out affair. This pair of cats first arrived on the scene just after 8.30 pm, and what followed was a series of photos showing the two intermittently circling each other, lying down and mating, more circling, snarling, hissing and even some aerial manoeuvres, with the last images captured shortly after 10 pm!

When a female leopard is receptive for mating, and a male manages to find her (remember, leopard ranges in the Cape mountains are massive), he will stay close to her and they will mate repeatedly over the course of a few days. This is because felids are "induced ovulators", meaning when a female is in oestrus, it typically takes a number of matings to actually stimulate the release of her eggs.

A second reason why the male will stay close is that the female is capable of something called "heteropaternal superfecundation" – fancy words that simply mean two or more eggs from the same cycle can be fertilised by sperm from separate mating events. This can lead to twin cubs with different biological fathers, if she mates with different males! So, by sticking around and mating repeatedly, the male is ensuring that he's the only sire of the whole litter of cubs.

How wonderful to see this behaviour on camera and catch a glimpse into the secret lives of leopards!

– Jeannie Hayward

3 May is International Leopard Day – read more at internationalleopardday.org

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OUT SURANCE

A feather for your thoughts



Befriend some birds and they'll make you smile for free. They'll impress with their incredible feats, and they might even show you a glimpse of the past.

WORDS **TOAST COETZER** ILLUSTRATION **NICOLENE LOUW**

I spend a lot of time watching birds. And they watch me back. I live in Stanford in the Overberg and I often put out seeds in the garden, especially during winter. The bounty attracts all manner of seedeaters like sparrows, weavers, doves and canaries. On some days, if I haven't fed them by 10 am, a sparrow will fly onto the stoep, perch on the back of a chair and peer into the house, as if to say: "Hey, what's wrong with you? Can't you see we're waiting?"

The companionship of these garden birds has a calming effect on me. I work from home and spend many solitary hours sitting at my desk staring at a screen. But then, hopping in through the open front door, comes a Cape robin-chat. It knows I'm there, sitting ten metres away, but it's fearless. It picks at crumbs that might have fallen on the floor, then politely sees itself out.

Other times, a pair of southern double-collared sunbirds flit in under the roof of the stoep. They seem to be collecting cobwebs from underneath some antelope horns on the wall, probably for nesting material.

Late afternoon heralds a shift change, when a platoon of speckled mousebirds rock up. They hit the greens in the vegetable patch – the kale and spinach – then retire to a saltbush of some sort, where they sit around looking cool with their punk hairdos. From the other side of the house, I hear common starlings chattering away from their perch on the power line that catches the afternoon sun. They might be *inkommers*, but I like their cheeriness. They're great mimics – I swear I often hear one impersonating the call of a fiery-necked nightjar.

To travel is a privilege – and to experience something of the freedom of the migratory bird is becoming harder all the time.

The handful of times I've been to densely populated cities in other countries like the USA, the UK and South Korea, I've always been struck by how devoid they are of birdlife. Sure, you see pigeons and a magpie or something, but it's an avian desert compared to Joburg or Pretoria where the leafy suburbs can attract anything from grey go-away birds and crested barbets to wood-hoopoes and firefinches. We're so lucky to have such diversity right outside our back doors.

Most garden birds hang around all year, but others come and go with the seasons. Like cuckoos: When you hear that first red-chested cuckoo calling "Piet-my-vrou!" it's a sure sign that summer is here. In the northern parts of the country, the woodland kingfisher's loud *kri-trrrr* does the same.

During our winter, the woodland kingfisher migrates north, but only as far as central Africa. Other species just move around locally, seeking somewhere warmer – much like the human "swallows" who trek up to Tshipise in Limpopo with their caravans during the frosty months and return to coastal resort towns on the KZN South Coast during summer.

Some species of birds are true global citizens. In 2024, BirdLife South Africa attached a tiny satellite tracker to a female European roller, nicknamed Hera, to see where she spent her winter. She was tracked up the coast of East Africa; she hung around in Somalia for a while; then she crossed into Asia and ended her journey in Uzbekistan. Most likely, this is where Hera made a nest and raised her chicks.

By December 2024, she was back in South Africa. On the return leg, she flew down the length of India, then did an Indian Ocean crossing back to the Horn of Africa before heading to the Waterberg in Limpopo. The journey there and back was an astounding 25 000 km!

In 2015, a European honey-buzzard was also fitted with a tag near Reitz in the Free State. It flew almost directly north and reached Finland just 42 days later!

When you zoom in on maps of birds' migratory routes, you'll notice that many of them use land bridges like the Sinai Peninsula to cross from Africa to Asia; or they fly over the shortest gaps of water available, like the Strait of Gibraltar between Morocco and Spain.

Many migratory routes criss-cross the Middle East. Whenever there's news about regional conflict, my thoughts turn to the birds that have to fly over war zones. If a European honey-buzzard flew from the Free State to Finland in 2025, it would have to fly over the DRC, Sudan, Israel, Syria, Ukraine…

At least birds are fast flyers and maybe up there, they skirt most of the danger. But I think about what they must see – a bomb that explodes on the horizon, a battle drone on the warpath, burnt-out military vehicles?

Birds might have flight in their favour, but they need the habitat, shelter and food of terra firma. The waders need wetlands, the swifts need an overhang in a hidden kloof, the rollers need a dry riverbed, the honey-buzzards need a forest. There must be insects to catch and eat, a mouse in a freshly cut wheatfield, grass seeds, fruit…

The world is our home too, of course, but we've largely lost the freedom that's so inherent to the lives of birds. Our forefathers stepped out of Africa and spread across the globe. They walked all the way to the southern tip of South America. They tamed horses and took dogs as pets. They reached Australia, built boats and eventually set foot on the beaches of Pacific Ocean islands like Fiji, Tahiti and even distant Easter Island.

It took many thousands of years for humans to fan out across the world like this, and while archaeologists can piece together roughly how and when it happened, most of those years will forever remain blank. Yet we lived through that time. And all the same birds were around back then, too. They migrated unhindered from Reitz to Finland, and from Limpopo to Uzbekistan, even though those names didn't exist yet. There was no Reitz 10 000 years ago.

Modern advancements mean we can fly or sail to virtually any place in the world – even Easter Island is just a week away from wherever you're reading this – but now we have a world divided into countries, with borders, presidents and flags. You need a passport, a visa and a good deal of money. To travel is a privilege – and to experience something of the freedom of the migratory bird is becoming harder all the time.

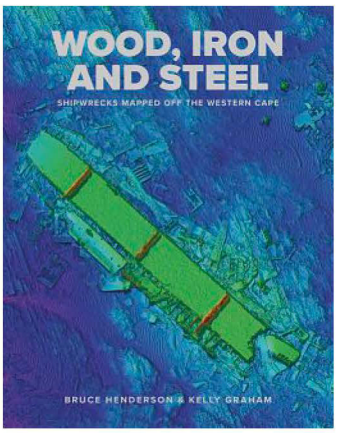
That's why I find solace in my humble garden birds: the sparrows and weavers, canaries and mousebirds. I've had wonderful opportunities in my life to see rare and special birds, from the prehistoric-looking shoebill in the swamps of Uganda to that mighty mariner of the Southern Ocean, the wandering albatross.

But I'll take the peppy chatter of a bunch of bulbuls any day. The olive thrush will always make me smile when I watch it kicking dried leaves all over the place as it searches for a snack. Even the bloodcurdling screech of a barn owl on the roof at night instils comfort.

Appreciating these birds helps me to imagine a bigger picture, an older picture, a more innocent picture. I see a time when us and the birds understood each other better; a time when we understood all of nature better, because we knew that we needed it to survive. Now, it's the other way around.

BOOKS AND MUSIC

COMPILED BY **MARTINETTE LOUW**



Wood, Iron and Steel

by Bruce Henderson & Kelly Graham, Quickfox Publishing
R895 in bookstores

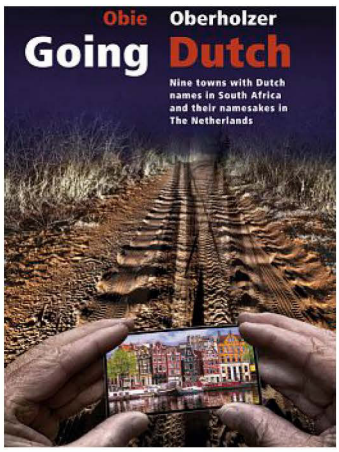
The Western Cape coast is known for its turbulent seas; many ships have met their end on hidden rocks and reefs over the centuries.

This guide – compiled by Bruce Henderson, founder of marine research company Wreckless Marine, and Kelly Graham, a technical diver and a researcher – showcases 60 ships that sank between Silwerstroomstrand near Melkbosstrand and Danger Point beyond Hermanus between 1698 and 2009.

The shipwrecks were surveyed as part of a project to map the seafloor in the region; the team used the latest multi-beam sonar technology to create high-resolution 2D and 3D images of the wrecks. They also visited some of the shipwrecks on dives and searched the archives to bring more information about the vessels to the surface.

Each entry includes information about the wreck in question, its history, how it was lost and where it rests. The sonar images are what sets this book apart, complementing the other photography, art and historical images of the ships.

If you're interested in our maritime history, this is a good addition to your collection.



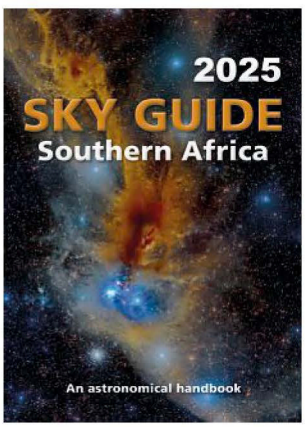
Going Dutch

by Obie Oberholzer, X-CAGO B.V.
R999 at Exclusive Books

In *Going Dutch*, the 16th coffee table book by legendary South African photographer Obie Oberholzer, he sets out to document nine local towns with Dutch names, alongside their counterparts in The Netherlands.

Photos of Haarlem, Dordrecht, Amersfoort, Ermelo, Amsterdam, Utrecht, Alkmaar, Rotterdam and Marken – in both countries – are presented side-by-side in Oberholzer's usual irreverent style. The text, which delves into history, current affairs and the relationship between the two countries, is also pure, unfiltered Obie.

In his search for the "odd, haphazard and weird", he turns his lens to street scenes, art, people and landscapes, always emphasizing extremes and contrasts. Oberholzer's passion for South Africa shines through on every page of this 444-page tome, underscoring the earthiness, resilience and vibrancy of this complicated place.



Sky Guide Southern Africa 2025: An astronomical handbook

by Astronomical Society of Southern Africa, Struik Nature
R180 in bookstores

No longer sure whether you're looking at a star or a satellite? This annual publication will help you fight the confusion in 2025.

It's a neat guide that lays out the position of planets and stars during each month of the year and highlights observable celestial events for you to add to your diary. It also includes star charts for each season, and sections about the sun and moon (never miss an eclipse again!), asteroids, comets, meteors and constellations.

It's aimed at amateur and professional astronomers alike, with great tips about stargazing for the former, and more technical information for the latter. The full-page special-focus photos of astronomical objects are especially handy if you're still learning the ropes – they make it easier to recognise specific features in the night sky.



ROAD MUSIC

Animal Farm

by Filthy Hippies, M-Pire Music
US$8 from bandcamp.com

Filthy Hippies, from Cape Town, have been around for a few years; this album came out in 2021. Their music falls into genres like psychedelic, dream pop and shoegaze.

Shoegaze? Yes, you know, you're at a music festival, sitting around the campfire staring at your velskoen while grooving to strange tunes drifting towards you through dust and thorn trees from a nearby car radio. Maybe it's "The Geneva Convention", on which Filthy Hippies sing, "I'm the astronaut running circles in your mind"… Yup, this is not Ed Sheeran…

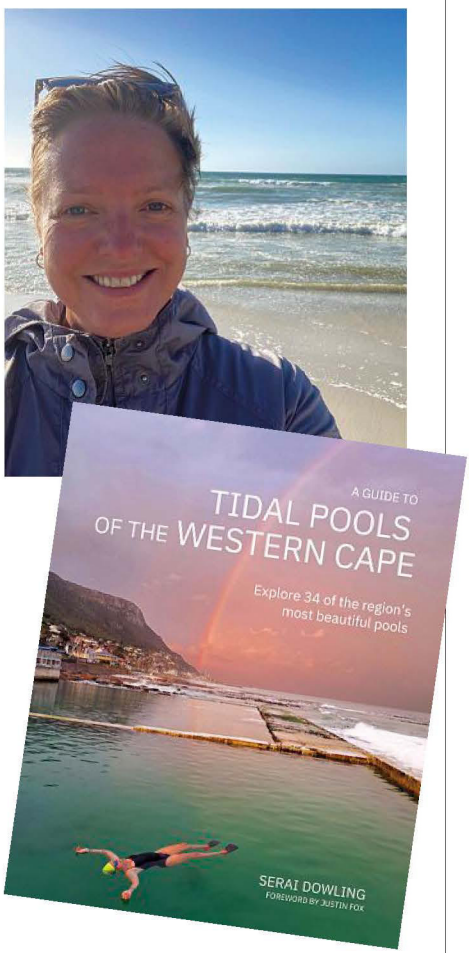
I'd suggest trying out *Animal Farm* on a stretch of road that transects different landscapes. Cue "Away" to speed you past the last of the city's lifestyle estates; "Sheep" to guide you beyond the small plots dotted with pigpens and chicken coops; and "Queen of the Dead" for when the tent is pitched and you're barefoot and dancing under a clear, starry sky. Good stuff.

– Toast Coetzer

MEET THE AUTHOR

Serai Dowling

Swimming in a tidal pool is one of life's great pleasures, even if the water is toe-curling cold. Not sure where to start? *A Guide to Tidal Pools of the Western Cape* gives you all the info you need.



In the preface, you describe a tidal pool as a haven. Why are they so special to you? Tidal pools are a sanctuary, not just for me and fellow swimmers, but for the marine life they protect from rough seas. They serve as a balm for body and soul, offering wonder, joy and a sense of calm among daily stressors.

Since moving to Cape Town from Joburg in 1999, the pools have been a refuge for me. Beyond my work as a writer and researcher, I navigate complex education challenges in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Ghana and South Africa, working to scale impactful programmes that benefit children. The tidal pools offer a place to recharge and reflect, away from the demands of my work.

More than just places of renewal, tidal pools are also vital urban spaces, offering safe, largely free environments where communities can come together across socio-economic divides.

How did you get into cold-water swimming? What began as quick dips in the Camps Bay tidal pool before or after work many years ago eventually became something more – a swim practice that enabled me to have more time in the water and challenged me to improve my cold-water tolerance and build strength, all while enjoying my surroundings.

I find it fascinating how you can observe the cold, acknowledge it, and push through, just as you can with uncomfortable emotions, allowing them to exist without letting them derail your quality of life.

Your book features 34 tidal pools in the Western Cape, from the West Coast to the Overberg… Do you have a favourite? I do! I love Miller's Point in Simon's Town for its incredible biodiversity, the size and depth of the pool, the fact that it's great for training, and of course the slide built into the rocks that allows you to slip into the water. How much more fun could an adult or (inner) child ask for?

What did you enjoy most about compiling the guide? Learning about the history of the pools and hearing the stories of the people who've used them over the years. They're not just pretty to look at, they foster community for vast swathes of the population.

My husband Matthew joined me for many exploratory adventures and his photos feature prominently. Having a chance to share my passion for the pools with him was really good fun.

What's the most interesting fact you found while researching the history of the pools? Cape Town has one of the densest concentrations of tidal pools in the world, and certainly in Africa. Many pools were built during the colonial period to emulate British coastal resorts, then they endured an exclusionary period through apartheid where most were off limits to people of colour. Lots of the False Bay tidal pools were built illegally by residents, before the City took over their maintenance. Access to these pools was facilitated by the advent of the railway line along that part of the coast.

Some experiences never change! In 1926, ladies who swam in the St James tidal pool complained bitterly about how difficult it was to get in and out because of all the rocks at the bottom. Ladies who dip there in 2025 feel the same way…

Which family-friendly tidal pools would you recommend our readers visit during the April school holidays? Camps Bay and Glencairn offer gradual sandy entrances while Miller's Point includes the fun of zooming down the slide into the water. The pools in Cape Point Nature Reserve offer braai facilities (look out for baboons!) while Dalebrook (in Kalk Bay) and St James offer sheltered bathing if the wind comes up. Further afield, Marine Pool in Hermanus is surrounded by rocks that offer fantastic rock pooling at low tide.

What are some of the benefits of cold-water swimming? Physically, the cold water has anti-inflammatory effects, improves circulation and strengthens the immune system. Mentally, it reduces stress, increases dopamine levels, enhances mood and builds resilience. Regular exposure can improve sleep, sharpen your focus and boost your overall wellbeing.

Any tips for cold-water swimmers? Go with friends! Take your time getting into the water, allowing your body to acclimatise gradually. Make sure to submerge your neck eventually – doing so stimulates your vagus nerve, which activates the nervous system in general and enhances the stress-relief benefits. After your swim, stop at one of the lovely cafés I recommend near each pool to enjoy a treat while taking in the beautiful view.

What are your swimming essentials? I've always got a bright cap, goggles, earplugs and flippers in my bag. A good mask and snorkel wouldn't go amiss either. I haven't yet adopted a changing robe, but these can be incredibly useful when your fingers are cold after a swim. And where would we be without a flask of tea and some fresh scones after a dip?

A Guide to Tidal Pools of the Western Cape is published by Rockhopper Books and costs R395 in bookstores.

The Mushroom Fundi

Table Mountain attracts all kinds of people – cyclists, hikers, tourists and the "mountain goats" who run to the top every day. And then there's **Gary Goldman**, wandering around with a basket… What's *he* doing – going on a picnic?

WORDS & PICTURES **SOPHIA VAN TAAK**

Even before we meet, there's a sense of adventure in the air. "Bring a pocketknife and a headlamp," Gary Goldman tells me in a WhatsApp message, followed by directions to the rendezvous point.

And now I'm here, shivering in the early morning dark in one of the highest streets in Newlands. A bakkie up the street flashes its lights and a silhouette gets out. Two four-legged shadows follow.

Gary greets me and retrieves a basket for each of us from the back of his bakkie. He calls the dogs softly and guides me to a gate in the fence – a shortcut into Newlands Forest.

I've never experienced the forest in this way. The dogs, Jack and Russell, take the lead in our headlamp beams. Moss-covered tree trunks float like spectres. A stream murmurs somewhere in the dark. Save for the sound of our footsteps on pine needles, everything is quiet. It rained last night and the soil breathes out the freshest, earthiest aroma.

Soon we reach the overgrown ruin of a cottage, once called Paradise. In the time of the Dutch East India Company, this was the home of the forest's master woodcutter. And during the first British occupation of the Cape, Lady Anne Barnard lived here for a while with her husband Andrew, who was the colonial secretary. There were fruit trees around the cottage and Lady Anne kept chickens, small antelope, a breeding pair of secretarybirds and even a seal and a penguin in the brook!

The stories give the ruin a fantastical aura. But the magic we're looking for is even deeper in the forest. Before we can continue, we first have to locate Russell, who is deaf and partially blind. Over there! A white ghost staring into nothingness. His dulled senses have lost our track.

As we walk, Gary tells me about his past, which was very far removed from the outdoors. "In the 1980s, when the whole world was boycotting South Africa, IBM and Apple also withdrew from the local market. But South Africans had to get computers from somewhere, so Warwick Smith-Chandler and Arthur Hughes founded Computer Warehouse. They imported containers full of parts and I was one of the guys who built up the PCs for them."

He stops for a moment, scans the area and adjusts our course slightly.

"The business was a giant success. When they sold it in 1988, my wife Essie and I made enough from my shares to travel the world for ten months. We went everywhere: Rome, Singapore, Australia, Hawaii, Los Angeles, New York, London…" he counts on his fingers. "We lived in Greece – on the island of Ios for a few months – and enjoyed it so much that we bought a bar and ran it for four years: the Tomato Bar. It was a wonderful time! The island lifestyle… I dived and spearfished and…"

Suddenly Gary crouches down and wipes away a layer of dry leaves on the ground. Carefully, like someone defusing a bomb. And there it is, the reason we're here – a mushroom as big as a saucer!

He slides his fingers down the side of the thick stipe, pulls the mushroom free and wipes off the soil. "Hmm… smell this!" he says, holding the mushroom to my nose. "The aroma, the taste… the world loves them." He drops it into my basket. "There you go. Your first porcini! Now you're also under its spell."

How did he know where to look? The mushroom wasn't even visible above ground!

"*Ag*, you get to know the mountain," he says. "At this time of the year, I know porcinis grow under oak trees. A little later in the season, I'll look for them under the pines. I've found 45 edible species on this mountain – you just have to know where and when to look. If you see leaves lifting slightly from the soil, like there's a mole underground, it might be a mushroom."

A few steps further, he pushes some leaves to the side again and picks another big one. It's like hunting for Easter eggs!

In the dark, under the dense canopy, I can't tell exactly where we are. "Are we near Hiddingh Ravine, below Maclear's Beacon?" I ask.

But Gary doesn't hear me. He's down on his knees next to a crop of new mushrooms. This time they're pine ring mushrooms, which have a slight indent in the middle of each cap. I crouch



Gary Goldman, aka the Mushroom Fundi, foraging for mushrooms in Newlands Forest with his dog, Jack.

down to look; Russell and Jack dig around, too. But we don't have Gary's experience and keen eyes.

He shines his headlamp against a growth on a log. "This one is an oak mazegill. You see the gills under the cap? They're dense and wavy, like a labyrinth. It's one of the saprophytic mushrooms. They grow on dead plant matter or animal carcasses and break them down. You also get mycorrhizal fungi: They live in symbiosis with their host and grow on its roots. The tree roots provide carbohydrates to the mushroom and in turn the mushroom spreads a network of fungal strands called mycelium underground, which the tree uses to absorb water and minerals like phosphate. And the third group is parasitic fungi – they attack living plants. They can rot a tree from the inside. When the tree finally crumbles and falls over, they become saprophytic and can live happily in the environment they created for themselves for the next eighty years."

No wonder people call Gary the Mushroom Fundi. There seems to be nothing about them Gary doesn't know.

So, how does a computer boffin become the Mushroom Fundi, I ask.

"You quit smoking!" he laughs. "It must have been around 1997... Yes, I was 37 when I moved to Observatory and suddenly Table Mountain was so close. We could see Mowbray Ridge from the backyard. My two boys were still toddlers and I'd kick a ball with them in a small field down the street. At that stage I smoked sixty Camels a day and I'd see stars when I tried to run after them. I realised I would have to stop smoking if I wanted to see them grow up. That's when I started hiking.

"The first morning after I stopped smoking, I parked at the edge of this forest and headed out. I had a Dalmatian at the time – Sambuca. But we couldn't even reach the first trees – I barely made it to the fire station heli pad! I could see the Saddle at the top of Newlands Ravine and I told myself my goal was to make it up there. One day."

Gary cleans a few more mushrooms with a brush and stows them in his basket.

"Before Greece and Computer Warehouse and all that, I was a navy diver for four years. When I left the navy, I still dived at Cape Point for crayfish and perlemoen (abalone). In those days, the quota was four crayfish and four perlemoen each, per day. Can you imagine? So, I was a forager long before the mushrooms. The day I saw my first porcini – the size and shape of it – it was like finding perlemoen on land.

"When I was young, we were always warned about eating wild mushrooms in the veld. 'Be careful, they're poisonous, don't even touch them!' But I just had to know – were these things edible?"

The harvest in our baskets is coming along nicely, and Gary lists them as we go: "bay bolete, panther, blusher, dyeball, deceiver, shrimp russula, turkey tail..."

He continues with the story of his mushroom awakening. "Back then I didn't know anything. Those first porcinis made me go to the library and all the books said you had to ask an expert whether a mushroom was edible before adding it to your food. Well, I'm still looking for that expert! He doesn't exist. There was no one I could ask, so I became the expert.

"I'm quite skilled with Excel spreadsheets and I started putting the information from the mushroom books into a database: the botanical name of every species, its common name, size and colour. And when I went on my walks, I picked every fungus I saw and took it home to see if I could identify it using all the information I had. I didn't know the mycology terms, but I kept reading with a dictionary close by."

In 2019, to make life easier for other mushroom hunters, Gary published his own book – *Field Guide to Mushrooms & other Fungi of South Africa*, with Dr Marieka Gryzenhout of the Department of Genetics at the University of the Free State, and photographer Liz Popich. The guide has thorough descriptions and colour photos of 200 mushroom species, and includes their distribution, habitat, appearance, names and uses. There are also notes on the characteristics you have to study to identify a mushroom: Is the cap smooth or does it have warts or scales? Is it bell-shaped, egg-shaped or flat? Turn it over and look at the gills – do they look like a fan or are they forked? And where's the stipe – in the middle or slightly to the side? There are even a few recipes for mushroom dishes. Gary is already working on a new version – this time he'll cover 430 species!

The sunrise bursts through the canopy like a searchlight. For a while we sit on the ground and listen to the forest waking up. Far below, somewhere, the commuters of the Southern Suburbs are heading off to work and the paths are filling up with more dogs, hikers and mountain bikers.

"Morning, Gary! Found anything good?" a woman asks, coming over to peek in our baskets.

"Hey, mushroom man! It's good to see you're out and about!" a cyclist greets as he whizzes past.

Seems like there's a whole community of people who start their day on the cool slopes of Table Mountain. And why wouldn't you? It's so peaceful here, and everything feels so fresh.

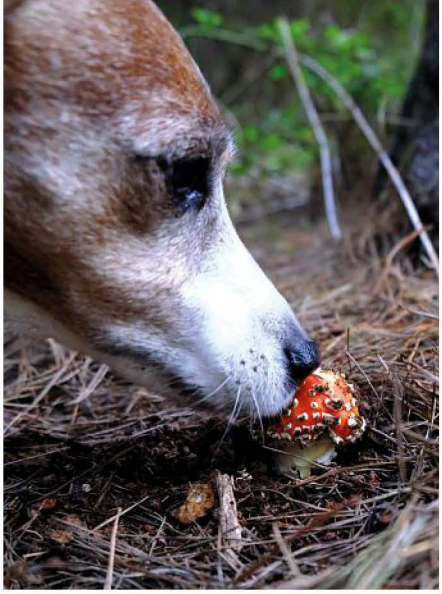
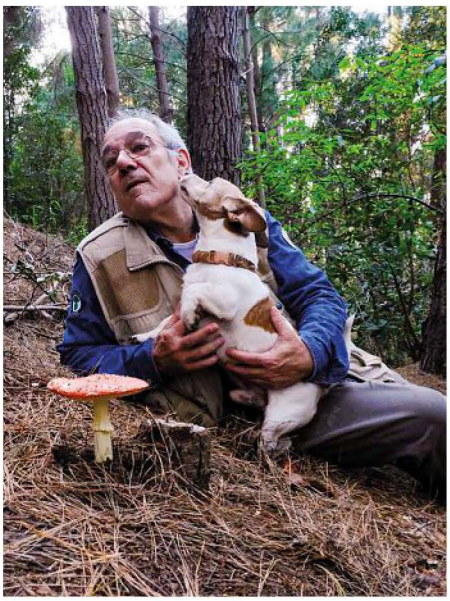
When Lady Anne sailed back to England aboard the *Scarborough* after nearly five years at the foot of Table Mountain, she wrote to Andrew, who had to stay behind for work:

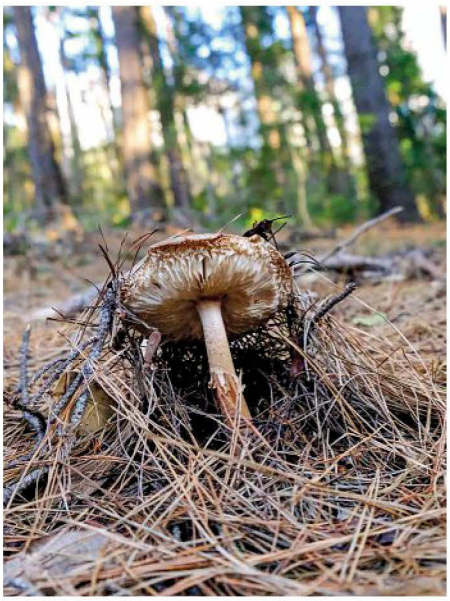
My Dearest and Best Beloved,
Never can I cease to recollect (while I possess memory) the sweetness of those drivings out to Paradise, the name of our little country house half way up a stupendous mountain, hyenas and jackalls, monkeys and eagles, my neighbours, the mild expanse of pure air above my head, and the all-seeing eye to look down on the innocence of our pleasures.

"Hey Gary, do you think Lady Anne looked for mushrooms?"

But Gary is no longer sitting next to me. We've lost Russell again!

Source: *Defiance – The Life and Choices of Lady Anne Barnard* by Stephen Taylor



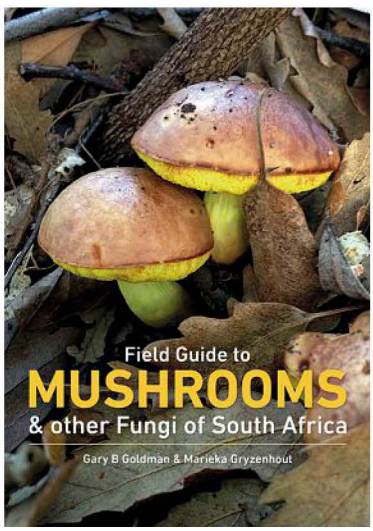

Clockwise from top left: Sophia and Gary's morning harvest included: porcini, blusher, shrimp russula (with the pink stipe; it smells like seafood), bay bolete and saffron milk cap. The fly agaric looks just like a toadstool from a fairy tale, but Russell knows, this one is for sniffing only! Oak mazegill growing on an old tree trunk. Bay bolete is a meaty and sought-after mushroom. A mature blusher. Gary, Jack and a huge fly agaric.

TIPS FOR MUSHROOM HUNTERS

- You should be able to find mushrooms in any forest or plantation in South Africa. Most species appear when temperatures drop to 4 – 8 ˚C and it has rained continuously for a few days. The season depends on the rainfall region you live in.
- Mushrooms begin to appear on Table Mountain in March and April. Gary says: "As soon as waterfalls form on the mountain, you can mark your calendar – there will be mushrooms exactly two weeks later."
- Mushrooms can be found for about two to eight weeks at a time, but every species makes its appearance under different conditions. As one species starts to wane, another takes its place.
- Never cut a mushroom off at the ground, because the remaining stipe will rot and die and not grow again. Rather pick the entire mushroom by pulling it from the soil.
- You need a permit (free) to collect mushrooms on Table Mountain. Send an e-mail to newlands.fieldrangers@sanparks.org. A permit is valid for three months.

Want to learn more?
Contact Gary Goldman: 073 936 2378

The *Field Guide to Mushrooms & other Fungi of South Africa* costs R500 at wordsworth.co.za



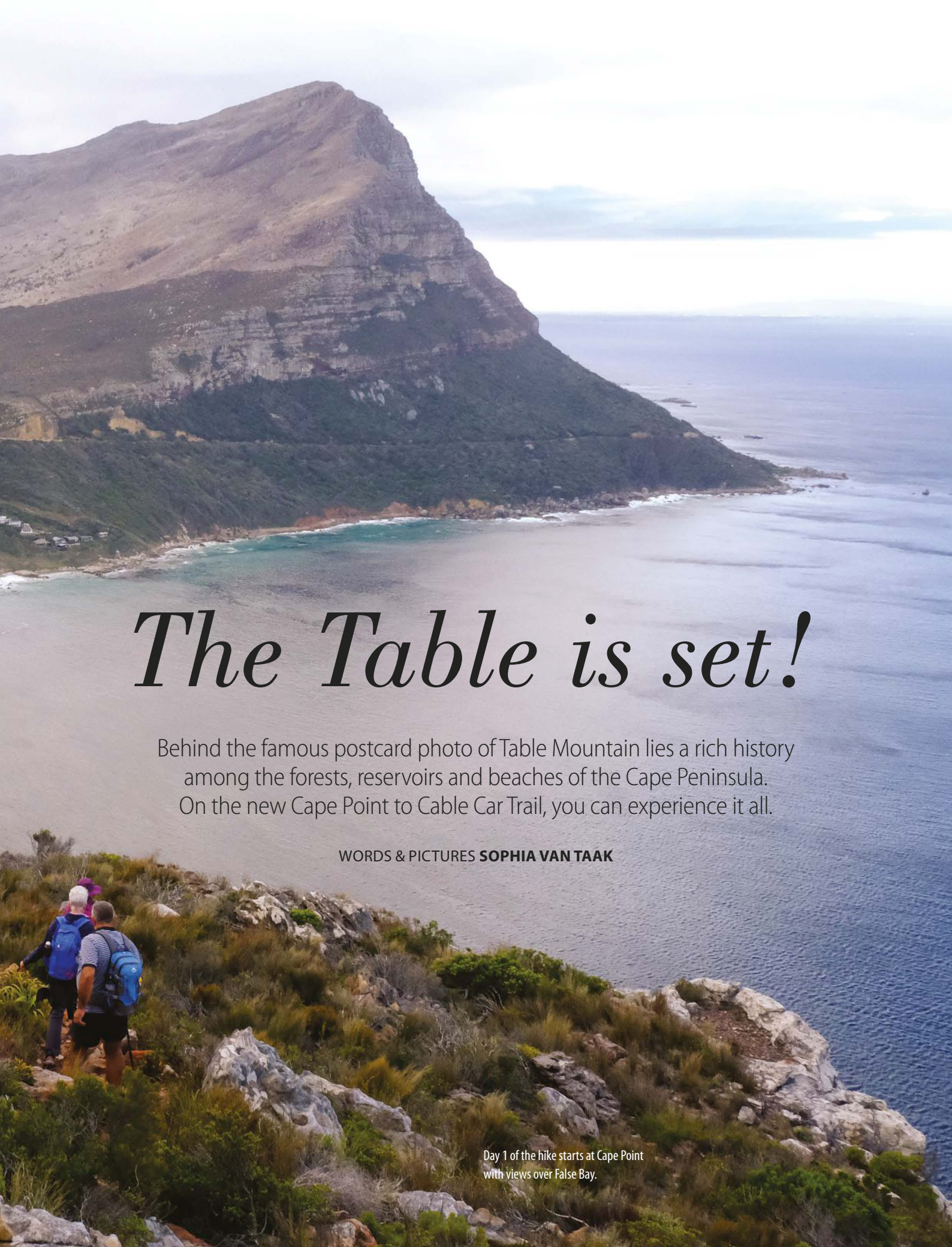
TAKE A HIKE



The Table is set!

Behind the famous postcard photo of Table Mountain lies a rich history among the forests, reservoirs and beaches of the Cape Peninsula. On the new Cape Point to Cable Car Trail, you can experience it all.

WORDS & PICTURES **SOPHIA VAN TAAK**



Day 1 of the hike starts at Cape Point with views over False Bay.

Opposite page, clockwise from the top: From Kanonkop, Cape Point is visible in the distance; that's where the hike begins. A female baboon picks some "salad" – to go with her seafood perhaps. Santie Gouws uses a piece of yellow ruler to indicate the size of animal tracks in her photos – these are zebra prints.

THE LIME BURNERS OF BUFFELSFONTEIN

In 1743, the Dutch East India Company started to use Simon's Town as a place to anchor their fleet in winter, when the stormy seas of Table Bay were too dangerous. Back then, the Cape Point section of Table Mountain National Park was carved up into farms – Blaauwberg Vlei, Klipfontein, Paulsberg, Klaasjagers and Buffelsfontein. The grazing here wasn't great and the soil couldn't produce enough vegetables to supply the ships, but there was one thing in abundance: seashells. And as Simon's Town expanded, the demand for building lime increased.

There were several lime kilns along the peninsula. Wheelbarrows full of shells were burnt to make calcium powder, which became lime when mixed with water.

Aside from the shells, John McKeller – the Scottish owner of Buffelsfontein in the middle 1800s – also used calcrete (a type of soil rich in calcium) from the surrounding cliffs. He went on to become the biggest lime supplier in the area and even acquired a schooner to transport his product from Buffels Bay to Simon's Town or Cape Town. Upon its return, the vessel would be loaded with coal for his kilns. One of these kilns can be seen near Bordjiesrif.

The sea churns around Cape Point a few hundred metres below my feet. These stormy waters have earned their own chapter in every ship's logbook for as long as seafaring has existed.

When you look at a map, the promontory I'm standing on is the tail of a giant stone animal that pulled itself from the depths before humans existed: Table Mountain. A world wonder. The inspiration for folktales. A mountain with a personality bigger than its cliffs.

Over the next five days, we'll get to know this iconic landmark very well. I'm on a guided hike with Santie Gouws, mountain guide and owner of Fynbos Whisperer Professionally Guided Hikes, and Erns Grundling, the presenter of *Elders* on KykNet and a regular contributor to this magazine.

When SANParks closed the five-day Hoerikwaggo Trail, many of the camps built for that trail had been damaged by fires and vandalism. Sections of the Hoerikwaggo also cut across private land outside the park, and disputes with landowners made it impossible to create a new multi-day adventure. The camps then fell further into disrepair.

But Santie and Erns had another idea. After many recce hikes where they searched for ways to connect the various parts of the mountain chain, they finally settled on a format: On this trail, hikers walk along the beach or in fynbos all day, and spend their nights in luxury guest lodges, with dinners in restaurants! Could this new experience offer the best of both worlds? Let's find out.

DAY 1 19 KM

Cape Point to Smitswinkel

We hide from the wind behind the lighthouse, ready to depart. But we don't want to rush the moment. For some members of the group, it's their first time here.

The original lighthouse was built in 1859, about 238 m above the sea, but on a day like today – with a thick bank of low-lying cloud blocking visibility – I can understand why a new lighthouse was built closer to the water in 1919.

Santie Gouws, who will be *our* lighthouse for the next five days, turns her back to the sea and we follow along a rocky ridge called Knife's Edge, then around the old radar station that has been converted into hiking huts on the two-day Cape Point Trail. Then we descend to the sea and walk along a rocky section for about 2,5 km to the Buffelsfontein picnic site and tidal pool. On the beach on the other side, Santie crouches down near something in the sand. Zebra tracks!

As we walk, we see more animals in this fenced section of Table Mountain National Park: eland, bontebok, ostriches, and baboons foraging near the Bordjiesrif tidal pool, where we stop for tea. They don't pay us much attention today, but things are different when you braai here on a weekend – they'll steal your sosaties if you're not careful. The Cape Point troop are connoisseurs: They've been observed supplementing their diet with seafood like crabs and mussels.

We passed a big stone cross earlier – a replica of a Portuguese *padrão* that early seafarers planted on unchartered terrain. This one commemorates Vasco da Gama, who sailed past here in November 1497.

Like his predecessor, Bartolomeu Dias, Da Gama also had to battle a gale-force south-easterly wind to get around the peninsula. The wind blew Dias off course and he lost sight of the continent, only reaching land again near present-day Mossel Bay! On his return journey in May 1488, he stepped ashore – there's a stone cross in his honour deeper in the reserve.

I sip my rooibos and wonder if Da Gama also sat here on the edge of False Bay. Did he wrinkle his nose at the sharp smell of kelp in the sun? No, an experienced mariner probably wouldn't.

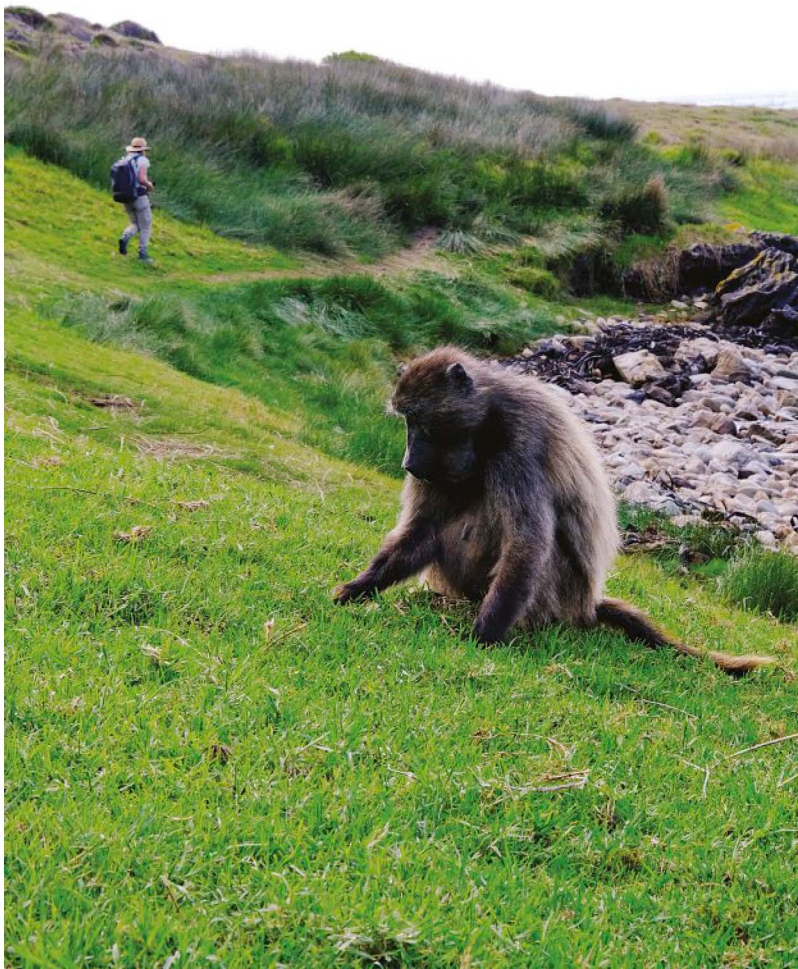
After a break, we climb up a kloof for about 1,5 km to Kanonkop. As the name suggests, there's a cannon at the summit – it was probably carried up here during the second British occupation of the Cape in 1806, and used to warn the naval base in Simon's Town when a ship entered False Bay.

After a quick glance backwards to see how far we've come, we forge ahead, around the back of Paulsberg (368 m; the highest peak in this part of the reserve), down through Noupoortjie and up a slope called Die Boer. For about 2 km, the group walks along the edge of a cliff 250 m above the waves, before the trail goes down behind Judas Peak to a viewpoint above Smitswinkel Bay.

By now we're all *moeg*, but we still have to exit the park and walk along the coastal road to the camp. The promise of a hot shower and a braai spurs us on.







Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Boulders is home to the critically endangered African penguin. The beach at Smitswinkel Bay with Judas Peak in the background. A 3 km tuk-tuk ride on the coastal road on Day 2 makes for a nice change in routine. Jager's Walk in Fish Hoek. The statue of beloved navy dog, Just Nuisance in Simon's Town. These narrow rock ledges lead to the cave at Smitswinkel Bay.

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DAY 2 13 KM

Smitswinkel Tented Camp to Simon's Town

The morning starts with an easy stroll to Smitswinkel Bay, possibly one of the smallest coastal villages in South Africa. It has no shops or streets – or even an access road! If you stay in one of the houses here, you have to park on the coastal road and walk down a path.

Smitswinkel was named after a rock on the beach that looks like a blacksmith's anvil. The village developed after the road from Simon's Town to Cape Point was completed: 29 camping stands in this sheltered bay were auctioned on 22 January 1916. Houses were built over the years; some have been in the same family for five generations.

Once you pass the houses, there's a cave in the cliff. Archaeological studies of shell middens have shown that people lived here as long ago as the year 550, dining on things like limpets and abalone. I'm grateful to have a packed breakfast!

After that breakfast, we climb a different footpath up the slope behind the houses, back to the road, where two tuk-tuks are waiting! We're supposed to hike along the beach towards Simon's Town all day, but the first few kilometres of coastline are too dangerous and the road has no shoulder. We're not complaining. The tuk-tuks are great!

The real hiking starts at Miller's Point. There's a popular tidal pool and picnic site here, but from 1825 to 1850 it was a whaling station owned by a certain Edmund Miller.

The vehicles on the road above our heads have no idea that we're down at the water's edge, admiring the rocky coastline. Watch your step because it's easy to roll your ankle... But the slow pace is just what I need to tune my soul to the ocean's frequency. The hikers don't say much, but we're all smiles.

By late afternoon, we reach the Boulders penguin colony just south of Simon's Town. It's easy to see why African penguins have been coming here to breed since 1982: Big rocks buffer the open ocean, giving good shelter. Boardwalks lead us through the dunes where the penguins breed in indentations in the sand or in tunnels. The smell and noise is overwhelming, but it becomes tolerable when you think that this species is now considered critically endangered.

Yes, there are only about 8 500 breeding pairs left in the wild. The decline in penguin numbers is mainly due to commercial trawling that has decimated sardine and anchovy stocks.

So, look at them closely. And when you stare into their pink-and-black eyes, tell them you're sorry for the devastation caused by humans. Who knows how long these tuxedoed birds will still be around for?

DAY 3 11 KM

Simon's Town to Kalk Bay

Today will be the easiest leg of the trail and we have time to be tourists. Our first stop is the statue of Just Nuisance on Jubilee Square.

Nuisance was a Great Dane, born in 1937, who was a friend of the sailors in town. When they caught the train to Cape Town, the dog often followed, much to the conductors' irritation – they warned that he must stay off the train or he'd have to be put down.

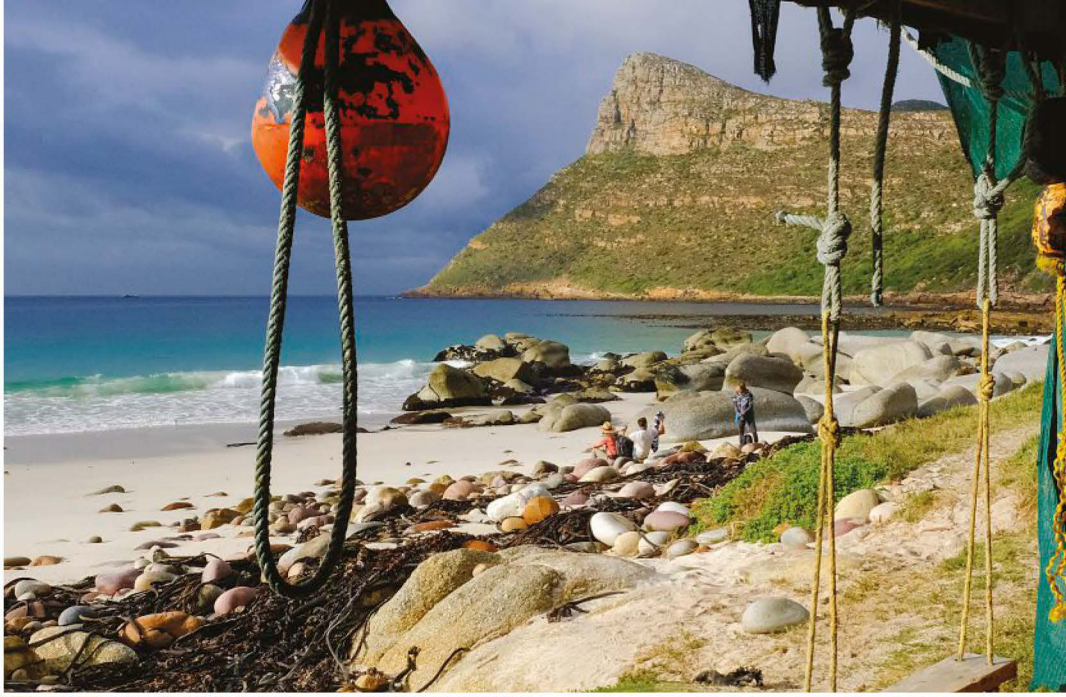
Many people wrote to the navy commander to ask him to do something. In those days, during World War II, all soldiers could take the train for free. So, the only solution was to have Just Nuisance join the navy – with the rank of Able Seaman!

As other people drive to work, we leisurely make our way north to Dixies, a restaurant and bar near Glencairn, where we settle in for a festive snack or two.

Feeling very relaxed, we carry on along the pavement to Fish Hoek where a pedestrian bridge takes us over the railway line to Jager's Walk. This concrete path dates from 1933 and was named after Herman Scott Jager, the first mayor of Fish Hoek. Many locals come to stretch their legs here – there are people seated on the benches, deep in conversation or basking in the sun like lizards. We do the same at Fish Hoek Beach, then run into the waves to cool off.

From the beach, it's about 3,5 km to our overnight spot in Kalk Bay. We dust the sand off our feet and walk to a classic hangout – Cape to Cuba – as the sun disappears behind the mountains. It's time for more touristy things, starting with a drink in the Hemingway Bar...








DAY-TO-DAY
TRIPS AND
TOURS
Muizenberg to Cape Point
+27(0)67 913 1590





Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Swimming at Fish Hoek Beach is a must when you're in the area. After a dip, the route continues along the beach to Kalk Bay. You start Day 4 in Kalk Bay at dawn. White everlastings hold their papery petals tightly closed. From Steenberg Ridge it's possible to see the start of the hiking trail and (almost) the end. You won't get lost: The guides know where to go at all times.

TABLE MOUNTAIN RESERVOIRS

Fresh drinking water was the main reason why Europeans were interested in this dot on the map. If it weren't for the streams on Table Mountain, there never would have been a Castle of Good Hope, never mind a city!

Many small reservoirs were built at the foot of the mountain over the years, but as the population grew, town planners had to think about the future.

From 1890 to 1897, a stone wall was built across Disa Gorge. It is 252 m long and 44 m tall and blocks the natural flow of water to form Woodhead Dam. The Hely-Hutchinson Dam was completed in 1904.

At the same time, two smaller reservoirs were built to the south – Victoria in 1896 and Alexandra in 1903. De Villiers Dam is the smallest and newest reservoir, dating from 1907.

The reservoirs still supply water to Hout Bay, Camps Bay, the city centre and Constantia. Water for the rest of the metropole comes from far away: Voëlvlei Dam near Gouda, Wemmershoek Dam near Franschhoek, Steenbras Dam above Gordon's Bay and Theewaterskloof Dam near Villiersdorp.

DAY 4 23 KM

Kalk Bay to Constantia Nek

Kalk Bay is still fast asleep when we climb the steps of Ponder Road, cross Boyes Drive and disappear into the thickets of Echo Valley. Today we'll mostly be hiking in the Silvermine section of Table Mountain National Park. The first 2 km climb is tough, especially after last night's fun. We're all very happy to see a clearing called Wandering Willy's Weary Wait up ahead. After a pause, we cross the Old Mule Path that rounds Muizenberg and carry on hiking up the narrow valley.

There's shade under yellowwood and milkwood trees. Near the top, Santie calls us to a halt and we take out our coffee flasks.

Then we walk down Klein-Tuinkloof below Kalkbaaiberg to where the route curves around the western end of the mountain and joins up with a jeep track. Now we make quick progress to Ou Kaapse Weg down below. We exit the eastern section of Silvermine and enter the gate into the western section.

Here, a boardwalk tracks the course of the Silvermine River for 2,5 km to the reservoir of the same name, where we have lunch and swim. I don't relax too much because we're only about halfway for the day...

Ja-nee, after lunch, a steep climb works the thighs, but soon we're on top of Steenberg Ridge with a view of Cape Point far to the south; the curve of False Bay to the east; and Devil's Peak and Table Mountain to the north. We have to watch our step as we zigzag down into Tokai's plantations – a blue-gum leaf is as slippery as a bar of soap underfoot!

Then we hit a dirt road again and follow it along the lower slopes of Constantiaberg. Far down below, the grim block of Pollsmoor Prison squats among some of the most expensive wine farms in the country.

By the time we reach Bokkemanskloof, the group experiences a collective sense of humour failure – and the climb up Vlakkenberg is still ahead!

Fuelled by nothing but team spirit, we eventually reach the top and shuffle down the other side. The day ends as it started – in the dark. We're exhausted. La Parada restaurant on top of Constantia Nek has no idea what's about to hit it...

DAY 5 11 KM

Constantia Nek to the cableway

It's the final day of the hike and we'll be tackling the Back Table all the way to the Cable Station. The sun is only just rising but the parking area at Constantia Nek is already busy – it's a popular gathering point for dog walkers and mountain bikers.

We avoid the main drag up the concrete road and instead climb the steps straight up Constantia Corner. It's misty. I can't see too far ahead, which forces me to notice other things instead, like clumps of everlastings with their flowers still closed.

We're in the rain shadow here – the wet conditions and prevailing winds have carved the sandstone of the Back Table into fantastic formations over centuries. We pass one artwork after another, climb through a poort and reach Camel Rock far too soon. (With a little imagination, you can see the long legs and humps...) Then the route goes down to De Villiers Dam, where everything seems fast asleep. Teatime.

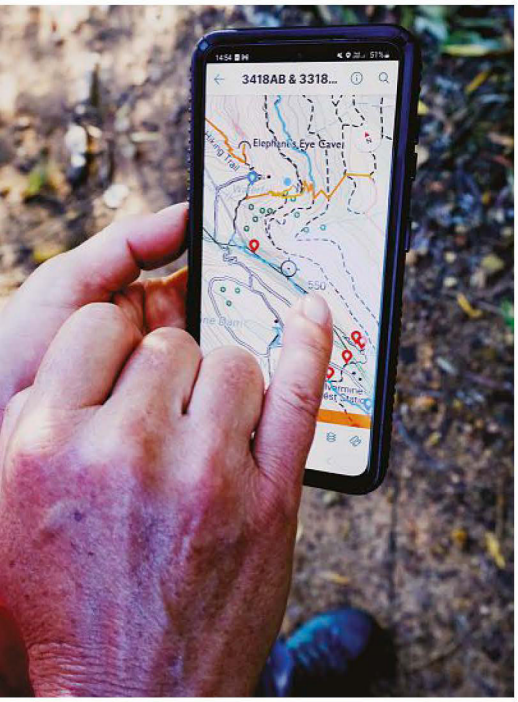
Now we make our way to the concrete road that connects all the reservoirs on the mountain. (It was yet another project of Thomas Bain's, dating from 1884.) We only stay on the road for a few hundred metres, then we turn onto a path that cuts into the fynbos. For a moment we look out over Cecilia Forest and Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden before Santie leads us through a hidden forest in Nursery Valley.

Why "Nursery" Valley? Around 1893, foresters planted all sorts of trees in this sheltered kloof. It's mostly cool and moist here and after they built a stone wall (the ruins are still visible), the young trees were protected against the wind. Oak, cedar, ash, walnut, elm, blackwood... When the trees were big enough, they were moved to plantations lower down, but a few remained and we catch our breath in their shade.

Above the treeline, we stand next to the biggest reservoir on Table Mountain: Hely-Hutchinson. The stone wall that separates it from its neighbour, Woodhead, is 528 m long and 16 m at its highest point. As we walk across, I think how much hard work went into cutting the stone, transporting it here, building



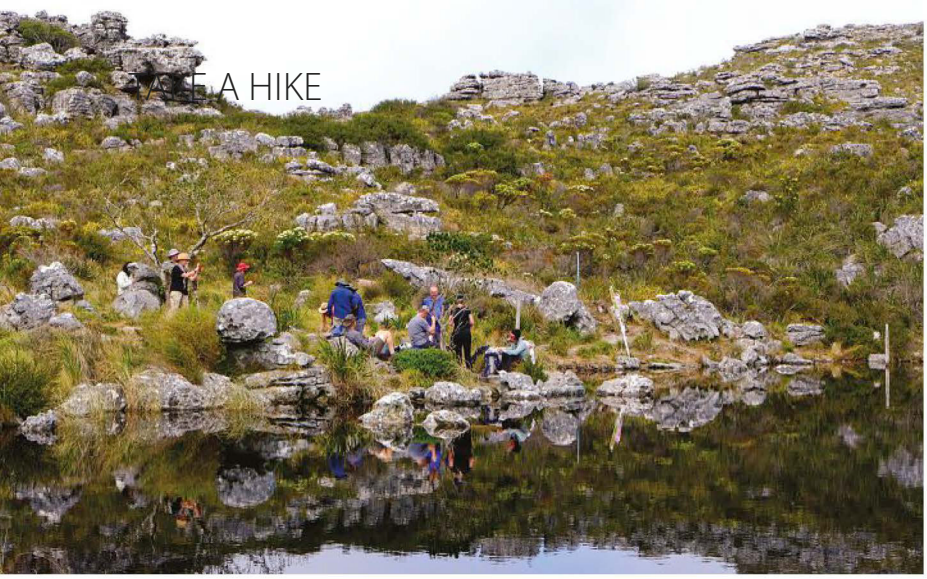



3418AB & 3318...
Elephant's Eye Cave

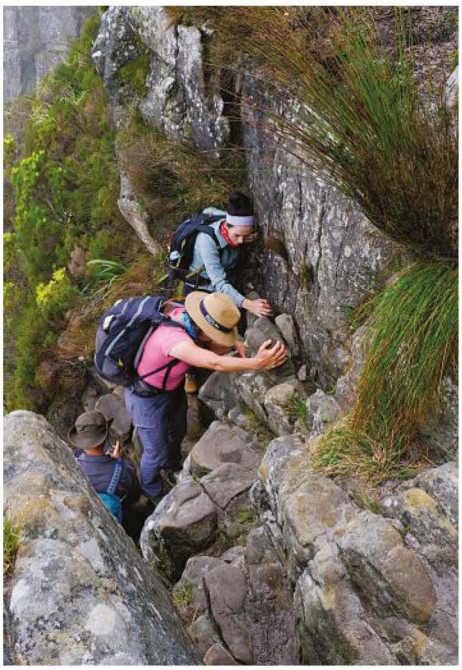












the wall. Back-breaking stuff.

Past the reservoirs, we climb to the nek between St Michael's Peak and Junction Peak for another wonderful view, then we descend into Echo Valley (not the same Echo Valley as on Day 4) and keep west to another junction: Left is the Valley of Isolation; straight ahead, Blinkwater Ravine drops away; right is a series of stone steps and long steel ladders to the top of Grotto Buttress. We go right and climb with the last bit of strength in our legs. From the top of the buttress, we look down over Camps Bay and the Atlantic Ocean shimmering in the late afternoon sun. I have mixed feelings: Five days of hard hiking is almost behind us, but am I ready to re-enter civilisation?

From here, the path to the Upper Cable Station is well trodden. As we get closer, we realise we're no longer alone. There are people everywhere! We stick to the edge, flustered, caught between a prayer group and a busload of chattering photographers.

The view of the city is one I've seen a thousand times, but I still get a lump in my throat. There's something about the strange blend of greatness and smallness that you experience on top of a mountain.

My tired feet are glad the hike is over, but we all decide to prolong our big adventure a little, with a sundowner at the Table Mountain Café.

By the time we queue at the cableway, the Twelve Apostles are a deep blue. On the way down, the city lights shine as brightly as our eyes.

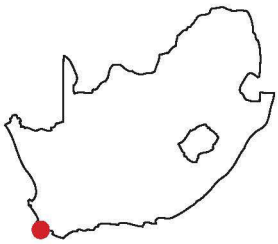
Sophia hiked as a guest of Cape Point to Cable Car.



Clockwise from the top: De Villiers Dam is the "newest" reservoir on the mountain. Ascending Constantia Nek requires a bit of climbing. Once you stand on this cliff edge on the Front Table, you've completed five days of hiking. Erns and Santie walk on the Hely-Hutchinson dam wall.



Fynbos expert Santie Gouws shares her knowledge of plants along the way – this is a Peninsula conebush (*Leucadendron strobilinum*). Follow her on Instagram: @fynbos_whisperer



KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

How does it work? The total hiking distance is about 77 km. Hikers will receive a comprehensive packing list beforehand. Registered mountain guide Santie Gouws is the leader and will be accompanied by either Erns Grundling or another guide every day of the hike. Your luggage will be transported from one overnight stop to the next and you only have to carry a daypack.

The package includes all permits, entry to the various parts of Table Mountain National Park, your cableway ticket, luxury accommodation and all meals and drinks. You'll sleep in a safari tent for one night – each tent has two single beds and an en suite bathroom; on the other nights you'll stay in private en suite rooms in boutique hotels and guesthouses along the route.

Date: 12 – 17 October 2025 (private groups can arrange their own date)

Cost: R22 500 per person sharing (SADC rate) – max 12 people.

More info: capepoint2cablecar@gmail.com
capepoint2cablecar.co.za

OTHER OVERNIGHT TRAILS

Even though the Hoerikwaggo Trail no longer exists, there are shorter overnight trails you can do on Table Mountain:

Cape of Good Hope (34 km) in the Cape Point section of the park is a two-day slackpacking trail. It has three basic hiking huts (for 18 people in total) with cutlery and crockery. The first leg of this trail is along the same route we followed on Day 1.
Cost: R413 per person plus a conservation fee of R105 per adult; R55 per child under 11; free with a Wild card.

Two of the **tented camps** on the **Hoerikwaggo Trail** – Smitswinkel and Slangkop – are still in use. Each camp has six en suite safari tents (each with two single beds) and an equipped kitchen with braai facilities. You can drive to the camp and hike trails from there.
Cost: Slangkop from R370 per person; Smitswinkel from R462 per person.
Contact: viwe.nibe@sanparks.org ; musa.singo@sanparks.org
021 741 2300 (Tokai office); 012 428 9111 (general bookings)

The **Overseer's Cottage** is on top of the mountain, near the reservoirs. It's a self-catering house that sleeps 16 people – bed linen is provided. No power, but there's a gas stove and geyser.
Cost: From R640 per person for the first six hikers, plus R594 per extra adult; R297 per extra child.
Contact: reservations@sanparks.org; 012 428 9111

Sources: capepoint.co.za; simonstown.com; birdlife.org.za; Tracks4africa's *Slingsby maps of Cape Point, Silvermine & Hout Bay,* and *Table Mountain; Early Cape lime-kilns* by James Walton (*South African Journal of Cultural and Art History, Vol. 1, 1987*); *A Personal History of Smits* by Billy Keen (underjudaspeak.wordpress.com); *Nursery Ravine Revisited,* GL Shaughnessy (*Veld & Flora*, December 1978)

IN OTHER WORDS



Nelda Smith (right), Pretoria
It was fantastic to see the peninsula from so many different angles and heights. What a wonderful and at times challenging experience! I was astounded by Santie's knowledge of the veld.



Dawid & Adré Matthee, Fochville
Dawid: *This hike exceeded my expectations on many levels. It was more scenic, more difficult and more enjoyable than I could have dreamt!*
Adré: *The sea, beaches, fynbos and especially the forest on top of Table Mountain will stay with me forever. All my aches and pains disappeared every time I stood still to appreciate my surroundings.*



Simeon Watson, Darling
You'll be amazed by the trails, the sights, the walking itself, the accommodation and food, and mainly by your own capability. This hike is the very best promise I've ever made myself. I want to do it again, now!



Ilse Grobbelaar, Kempton Park
It was truly a transformative experience that got me out of my comfort zone. As we walked, I felt a deep peace and clarity, a connection to something bigger than myself.

WITH MY OWN EYES

Wild and wonderful

Our readers see the wildest things – and they get the photos to prove it! In this bumper edition of With My Own Eyes, we share a handful of special sightings, from waterhole dramas in the Kgalagadi to family portraits of secretive kingfishers in Plett – even a black mamba munching a bat in the Kruger!

COMPILED BY **TOAST COETZER**

KARIN BRABY

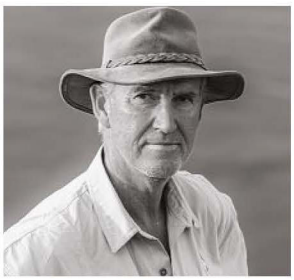


A half-collared kingfisher, photographed on the Piesang River in Plettenberg Bay.





In September 2024, **Rob Smith** came across a breeding pair of half-collared kingfishers in his hometown of Plettenberg Bay. With the help of his photographer friend, **Karin Braby**, they documented the pair as they mated and raised chicks.





While exploring along the Piesang River, in a forest that forms part of the Plettenberg Bay Country Club, I spotted an iridescent bird in the shadows about 20 m away –a rare half-collared kingfisher!

I returned the next morning, this time armed with my Nikon D850 and Nikon 200 – 400 mm lens. I found the same bird, but then another arrived – they were a pair! **1**

This chance discovery turned into an eight-week assignment. I returned daily to photograph the pair. Classified as "near threatened" in South Africa, discovering a pair of half-collared kingfishers on a stream in dense forest is testament to the health of the Piesang River.

I learnt a lot about the birds during the hours I spent observing them. For example, I noticed that once one of them had caught a small fish, it would hold its catch head-first when it carried it into the burrow in the riverbank where they'd made their nest. I later found out this is the way it presents food to its mate – always head-first.

The pair's nest was 30 m from a small pond where they hunted. About a week into the assignment, I saw the two birds mating. **2** Many an hour was spent watching as one bird would bring fish and tadpoles to its mate.

From a photographic perspective, capturing fast-flying kingfishers in a dark forest presents significant challenges. Many of these images were captured at an ISO of 25 600. I couldn't shoot hand-held with such a heavy zoom lens, so I would lug a sturdy tripod along.

Sadly, my forest forays ended in tears – for me, that is. My entire set-up, camera and all, fell into the stream! It was right after I'd snapped the shot of the kingfisher with the frog in its beak. **3**

I noticed in early November (six weeks after mating) that frogs and crabs also became part of the regular diet **4**, in addition to larger fish and tadpoles. One kingfisher would bring food to its mate, then bathe in the water below the nest and go off hunting again, returning in some instances only a few minutes later.

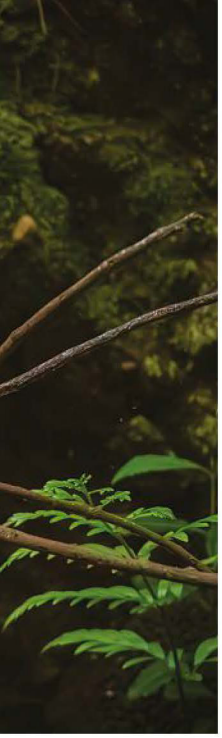
I also saw a broken eggshell below the burrow – another telltale sign that the chicks had hatched. It took another week for the fledglings to emerge. By my calculation, it was now eight weeks since the pair had mated.

At this stage I had to leave town for a week, but my fellow photographer, Karin Braby, stood in for me. She captured the fledglings' first day out of the nest as the parents feverishly taught them to fly, all the while feeding them copious amounts of crab and fish. **5, 6**

And then the two fledglings disappeared. I wonder where to? A different section of the same stream? Will the adults produce another clutch this summer?

These birds gifted Karin and me the opportunity of enjoying their lives in such a pristine place. We're extremely fortunate to have photos of their brief spring romance.

Follow Rob on Instagram @robtraverssmith and Karin @karinbrabyphotography

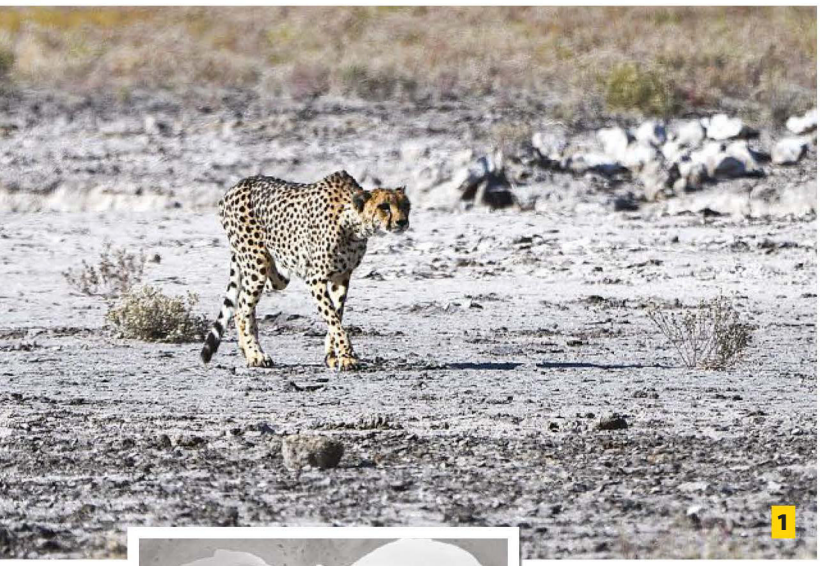



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KARIN BRABY


6
KARIN BRABY


1


2



Hugo Haumann and his wife **Elmarie** are from Hermanus. They visited Etosha National Park in Namibia in May 2024. One morning near Namutoni, they got lucky…


3


4

Elmarie and I noticed a cheetah resting in the shade of a bush not long after we left Namutoni. But it was quite far from the road – you needed a pair of binoculars to get a good look at it. We decided to drive around for a bit and return later.

By the time we got back to the same spot, the cheetah – which seemed to be a young one – was up and about. He started using our vehicle as a shield and stalked a nearby springbok. The springbok was grazing and had no idea what danger lurked nearby. **1, 2** I was ready with my Nikon D850 and Nikon 80 – 400 mm lens. Like a flash, the cheetah set off after the springbok! **3, 4** I was sitting in the driver's seat and luckily for me, all the action happened on that side of the car.

The springbok was too quick for the inexperienced cheetah and managed to escape. The cheetah came to sulk near the car and stared wistfully into the distance.

WITH MY OWN EYES



Ard van de Wetering and his wife **Marissa** live in Pretoria. They're regular visitors to the Kruger Park. On this visit back in April 2016, they had a strange, unsettling sighting.

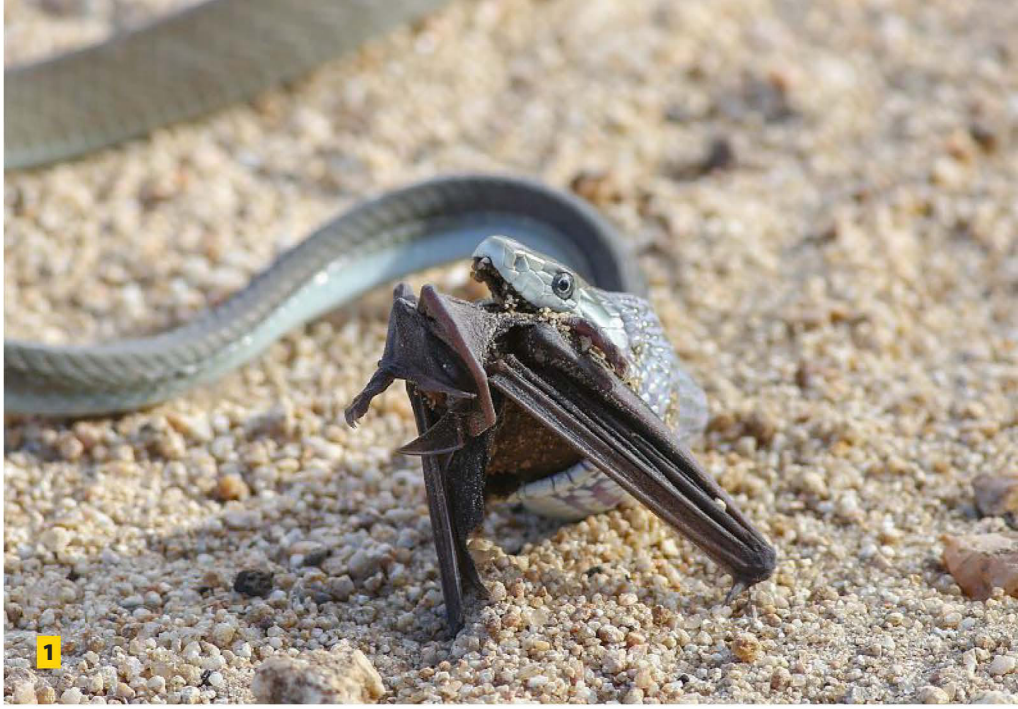
We love being in the bush and the Kruger is close enough for us to visit often. We're not just Big Five people – we're passionate birders and appreciate the smaller things.

We left Talamati camp one morning and drove along a dirt road. Soon we came across an unusual shape in the road. When we got closer, we could see that it was a young black mamba with a large bat in its mouth. It was trying to swallow it, or spit it out, but evidently the bat's odd-shaped wings had gotten stuck in its throat. **1**

The mamba rolled and writhed, trying to rid itself of its prey. It was clear that this had been going on for a while and it seemed as if the snake's powers were waning. It must have been in a lot of discomfort and pain. **2, 3**

We felt sorry for the snake as we drove away. Its eyes had been bigger than its mouth, and it was paying a heavy price for its error in judgement.

Follow Ard on Instagram: @ard_vd_wetering











WITH MY OWN EYES



When **Bomber Kent** from Makhanda (Grahamstown) visited the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park in August 2024, he got into the thick of the action at Cubitje Quap waterhole just north of Nossob.

We were in the Kgalagadi for three weeks, with bookings at Twee Rivieren, Urikaruus, Kalahari Tented Camp, Nossob and Grootkolk. During our stay at Nossob, I drove to Cubitje Quap waterhole around 9 am every day. This is when the sandgrouse (and other birds, like doves) usually arrive to drink. You can expect action, with black-backed jackals and lanner falcons trying to catch the birds.

When I arrived there, I saw a juvenile Gabar goshawk sitting at the waterhole. **1** Around it, Namaqua doves were swooping in to drink in their droves.

I was using my Nikon Z9 with a Nikon Z 180–600 mm lens, so I could zoom right in on the goshawk. It was swivelling its head around as the doves flew over. To my surprise, it suddenly sprang up and caught a dove! Luckily, I had set my camera to a fast shutter speed of 1/4 000 of a second, so I managed to freeze the action. **2–4**

After this, I settled in for a few hours, waiting for further opportunities. The action ebbed and flowed – at times it was dead quiet. There were some catches, but also near-misses. **5–7** I started getting cramps in my thumb and forefinger as they were on the focus and shutter release all the time!

When I returned to Cubitje Quap on another day, the goshawk was nowhere to be seen. I'm glad I spent all those hours at the waterhole the first time around. With some knowledge of animal behaviour and plenty of patience, the Kgalagadi will always reward you.

Follow Bomber on Instagram: @bomber0707

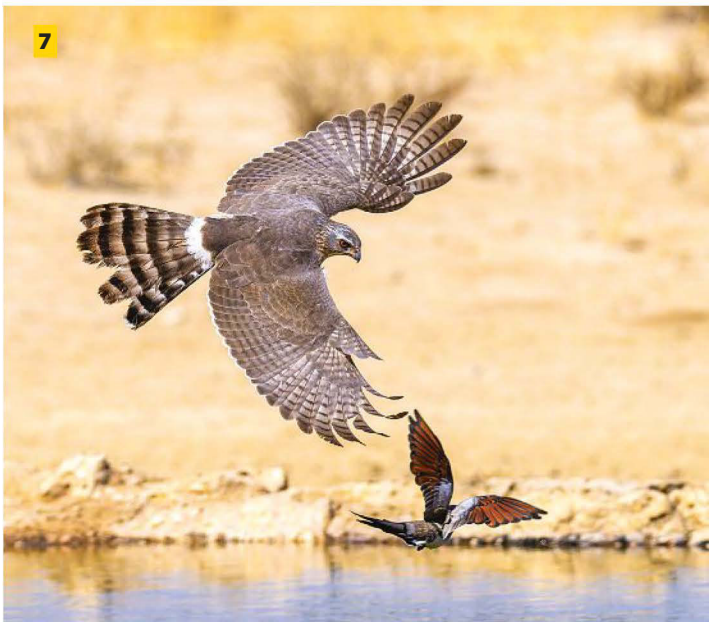



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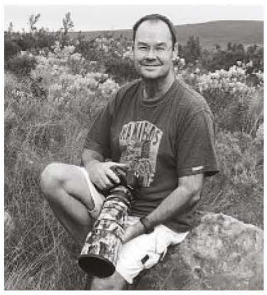

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WITH MY OWN EYES



In March 2024, **Hennie Blignaut** from Swellendam travelled to the Kgalagadi in search of fresh sightings. At Kij Kij waterhole, he encountered an unlikely "fisherman".

I was driving along the Nossob riverbed road, coming from Twee Rivieren. As I approached Kij Kij, I noticed several vehicles already parked there. Getting closer, I saw a lone black-headed heron. Why all the fuss, I thought? But then I saw what the heron was up to…

It was standing in the water and "fishing" at the small birds that came flying in by the dozens to quench their thirst – not realising it may be their last drink.

This heron had mastered its craft. Stealthily, it would move towards a target, eyes fixed on its prey. Sometimes the head would sway from side to side ever so slightly, all the time inching closer until it was within striking distance.

The strike, when it came, was fast and deadly accurate. **1 – 4** Once the heron had a good grip, it would "dunk" its prey in the water. I wasn't sure if it was drowning the bird or just wetting it – which might make it easier to swallow? Then it would reposition its prey in its beak and gulp it down with two or three swallows. **5, 6**

All the while, a lanner falcon watched the action from its perch in a nearby tree. It must have realised there was an opportunity here. During one of the heron's attacks – while it was distracted – the falcon swooped in with outstretched wings and talons, attempting to steal the bird from the heron! The heron, however, was way too fast and wily, easily outmanoeuvring the falcon.

The speed at which this happened was incredible and my Nikon D850 can only take seven frames per second, which is slow compared to new mirrorless technology. Still, I was able to capture one decent photograph of the lanner falcon. **7**

Moral of the story: Always be ready! But above all, enjoy the moment.

Hennie is the winner of the Thule Subterra Powershuttle pouch for his unusual contribution. Congratulations! See the sidebar on the opposite page for how you can enter a series of photos of your own special sighting.








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WIN!

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With the Subterra PowerShuttle, you'll never have to search for a single cord again! For more information about this and other great gear for your active lifestyle, visit thulestore.co.za.



This is the approach to Wupperthal from the Eselbank direction. In the top left, the road winds up the Kouberg Pass to Clanwilliam.

Where the Lord rested

Wupperthal is a village deep in the folds of the Cederberg. The people who live there are no strangers to suffering, but they're also full of hope. Come say hello – they're waiting to welcome you.

WORDS & PICTURES **WILLEM VAN DER BERG**



Clockwise from top left: Barend Salomo and Anville Koopman are at the helm of tourism in Wupperthal. The final resting place of missionary Johann Gottlieb Leipoldt, founder of the village and the velskoen factory. Benedict Salomo, Barend's son and production manager of the rooibos co-op, demonstrates how young rooibos plants are removed from the soil before being replanted on a farm. On most evenings, you'll hear the sounds of the Wupperthal Brass Band drifting from the beautiful town hall.

After the Lord made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that is in them, he rested. And where did he rest? Next to the Tra-tra River: the most beautiful place on earth. He knew no one would bother him here, deep in the ribcage of the Cederberg.

"*Ja-nee, kyk*, that's the thing about Wupperthal," says Barend Salomo, one of the people in charge of tourism. "It's paradise, but it's not an easy place to reach, or somewhere you end up by accident."

To get to this former mission town, you have to travel far into the Cederberg, east of Clanwilliam, across the Pakhuis Pass, through the Biedouw Valley and down the Kouberg Pass.

A few years ago, one of Barend's cousins came to visit him for the first time. "He arrived at night and it was beautiful outside, so we slept in the open," Barend says. "The stars were so bright; it felt like we were lying among them. When the first light hit the mountains, my cousin looked around in awe. For the first time, he saw where he was. He said: '*Heerlikheid neef*, does the Lord know you're here?' And I told him: 'This is God's hiding place.'"

But the last few years have been challenging for Wupperthalers. At times, the people here have wondered if the Lord had forsaken them.

The fire came first. On 30 December 2018, a blaze raged through the village and destroyed 52 thatched houses and many other historical buildings. About 200 residents lost almost everything they owned. Help came swiftly, mostly from the Rupert Historical Homes Foundation, which made sure all of the buildings were restored to look as close to the originals as possible, down to the door handles and roofing screws.

But when it was time to build new roofs, they ran into trouble.

"Most of us wanted modern galvanised steel roofs to prevent the same thing from happening again in the future," Barend says. "But then we heard we're part of the town's 'heritage' – apparently the whole of Wupperthal and the ground we walk on belongs to the church."

Indeed, the village was established in 1830 by the Rhenish Missionary Society. It was the main mission station that served several outposts in the area: Heuningvlei, Grasvlei, Eselbank, Brugkraal… In 1965, the settlement was transferred to the Moravian Church.

As such, the village is an important heritage site, and all changes should adhere to the rules and regulations of the church and the provincial heritage authority, Heritage Western Cape.

"When tourists visit Wupperthal, they want to see thatched houses, the 'heritage'," Barend continues. "We don't want to seem ungrateful, and we know we need tourism, but it's difficult when people who have never lived here tell us *how* we should live."

And then, in the winter of 2024, the heavens opened and rain turned the community into an island. Mountain streams became floods. Vegetable gardens, farm fields and hectares of fertile soil disappeared under the waves, leaving dongas and gravel in their wake.

"It was another difficult time," Barend muses. "Some days it felt like our faith was hanging by a rooibos *takkie*. But here we are now. Things are looking up. We want people to come visit. Because through it all, we're still the friendliest and most hospitable people in the country. You know, the Afrikaans author C Louis Leipoldt spent a lot of time around here as a child. His grandfather was the first missionary. And look at his beautiful writing. Spend time in our veld and you'll feel the poetry."

Music is another form of poetry in Wupperthal. On dusky nights, instruments send notes into the sky along with the chimney smoke.

"When I play, it's like I'm saying thank you for another beautiful day," says Aubrey Ockhuis, leader of the Cape Wupperthal Brass Band, which lost most of their instruments in the 2018 fire. "The instruments we have now were all donated, which means we're even more grateful to play," he says. "We practise often to keep our lips in shape!"

Aubrey did a lot of the stonework when the town was rebuilt. "It's funny – there aren't many job opportunities in Wupperthal, but there was a lot to do after the fire. Our people learnt many new skills. I build with stone and my work is now in demand in other places. More reasons to give thanks…"

Velskoen and rooibos

One of the biggest attractions in Wupperthal is the velskoen factory, founded by the missionary Johann Gottlieb Leipoldt. There




JOHANN GOTTLIEB
LEIPOLDT





Clockwise from top left: Shelley-Ann Zimri (left) and Beulah Engelbrecht plan to produce leather bags in the velskoen factory. Mervin Valentyn is a third-generation shoemaker: He learnt his trade from his father and grandfather, both shoemakers at the same factory. Pop in to buy a pair of quality shoes or sandals. The veld and rooibos tea are an essential part of her, says Christoline Swartz. Not even a sickle will remove her love of the veld. Late winter is a magical time in Wupperthal – wildflowers, plenty of water and blue skies.

were times when the factory actually closed down, and times when it wasn't clear whether it was open or not. But if you go there now – on any day except Sunday or Monday – you'll find Shelley-Ann Zimri and Beulah Engelbrecht, and sometimes Mervin Valentyn, who makes miniature shoes you can add to a keyring or hang from your rear-view mirror.

"We've stopped making shoes for the time being, so we can sell the stock we have," says Shelley-Ann, who runs the factory. "Covid, the fire... We didn't get enough buyers over the last few years."

Mervin remembers a time when the factory was full of shoemakers, and the noise they made. "It's a skill that has been passed down generations for almost 200 years," he says. "My father Daniël taught me – they called him Oom Baard. And my grandfather Ool taught him. The young people of today aren't interested. They want to go to the city and buy their shoes. So now it's just me and the ghosts in this factory."

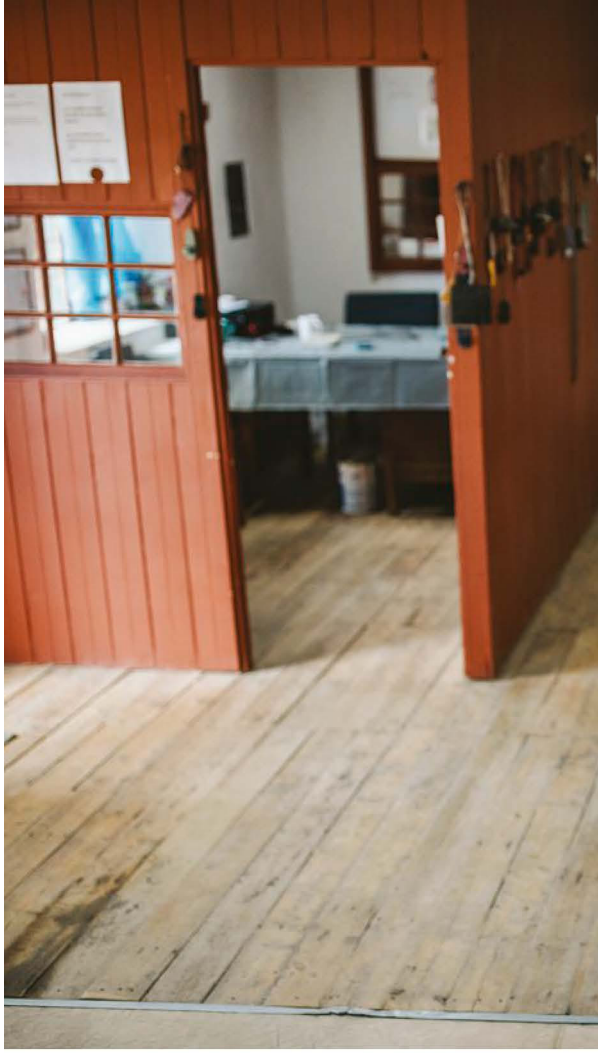
This part of the country is also known for its rooibos. As Barend says, people go from mother's milk to rooibos tea around here. Rooibos occurs naturally in the Cederberg, but it's also planted and harvested. Wupperthal has its own Original Rooibos Cooperative made up of 72 farmers in the area.

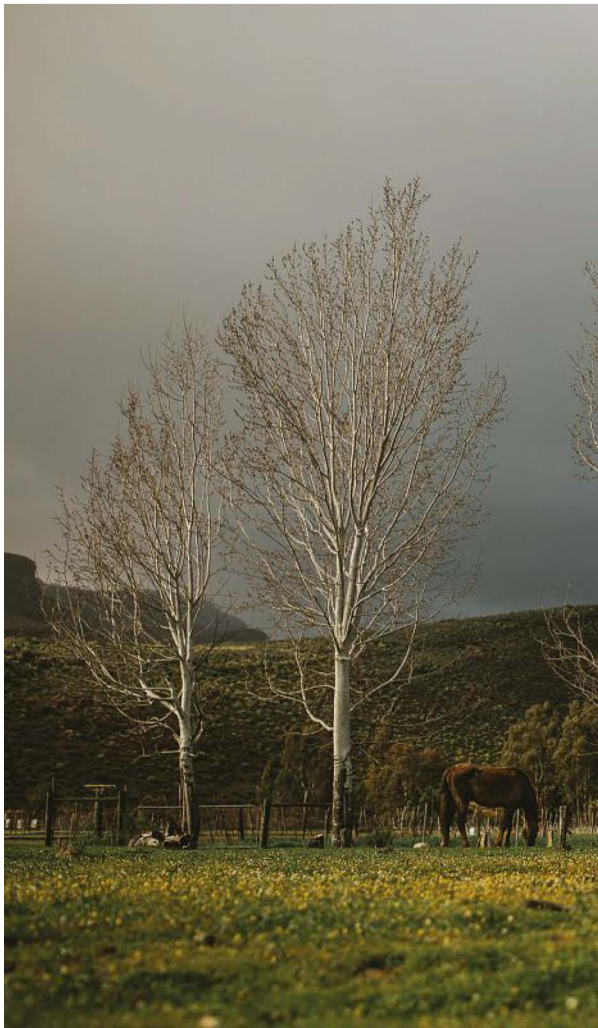
Christoline Swartz is on the management team of the co-op and says Wupperthal's rooibos is the best in the world. "Our Khoisan ancestors used rooibos and we carry all that knowledge with us. We try to farm with nature, just as the people before us did. We work with the moon. We look and listen to the veld. We use no chemicals or other harmful substances."

One of the jobs of the co-op is to make sure that the farmers who supply their produce follow the same principles. This philosophy is what makes rooibos from Wupperthal unique.

Christoline wears her love of nature like a fynbos crown. "I grew up in these mountains," she says. "The veld is my life."

And in Wupperthal, the veld is everywhere. Look through the window of your house and you see it; it's behind the school; it's next to the children playing rugby in the late afternoon; it's around you when you work in the rooibos fields; it's along the footpath to your neighbours' house. The sun rises from the veld and sets there again. And the next day, the veld is reflected in the simmering water of the Tra-tra.






WUPPERTHAL
SHOE FACTORY















Clockwise from top left: After the big fire, the sports ground was used to accommodate temporary housing. Today, it's once again a rugby field. The early morning bray of a donkey makes for an unusual alarm clock. At the age of 85, Oom Woeka has seen and experienced a lot. He provides more than groceries from behind the counter of his shop: His stories are free! Wupperthal's historical buildings have been beautifully restored. The town hall (right), shop (left) and all other buildings are as good as new, yet stayed true to the originals. Residents from the neighbouring settlement of Langbome cross the Tra-tra River on their way home.

That's why the people of Wupperthal always return home.

"My grandfather always said, '*Jou wegspringplek is weer jou komstaanplek*,'" says Woeka van Rooy in his shop, which is officially called the Wupperthal Café but colloquially it's Oom Woeka se Winkel.

Oom Woeka lights a cigarette. "I can't stop smoking now!" he says. "I'm 85. My body has adapted. If I stop now, I'll die."

In all his years, he only left Wupperthal for a short while to go work in Cape Town. "*Jô*, but then I drank too much. So, I came back and stopped drinking."

Oom Woeka left school at 14. "It was the apartheid years. As a child, I didn't think I could become anything. So I thought, bugger it, I'll try and earn money as soon as I can."

He worked in the velskoen factory for 25 years, during a period when they also made work gloves. At one stage, he bought two pigs. Soon there were 150.

"*Jislaaik*, that was a great business. I made a nice profit."

Like many people in Wupperthal, Oom Woeka knows about starting over. On that December day in 2018, just after he'd restocked his shelves, the wind carried the fire inside.

"The shop had only been open for about two years at that point; it had just started making money. It was all gone in five minutes. My house, too. The money in the safe – *moertoe*. I picked up coins in the ashes and put them in a bowl of Coke to clean them. It was about R900 in total. I used that money to buy supplies and start the shop again."

From the ashes, with burnt cents.

"Yes, I love to work. It's alright," he says. "I struggle and I like it."

Oom Woeka squints when he laughs because everything is alright as long as he can't see the flames. He gets pensive. "When these things happen, you sometimes get angry. At God, too. Many people here were very angry. We're church people – we believe that God will look after us. But the earth is vast and God can't attend to every plume of smoke. And do we expect him to count out every drop of rain for every place? So here we are. Our town looks better now because God sent people and help. He will always look after Wupperthal. This is his resting place. We are his people."

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

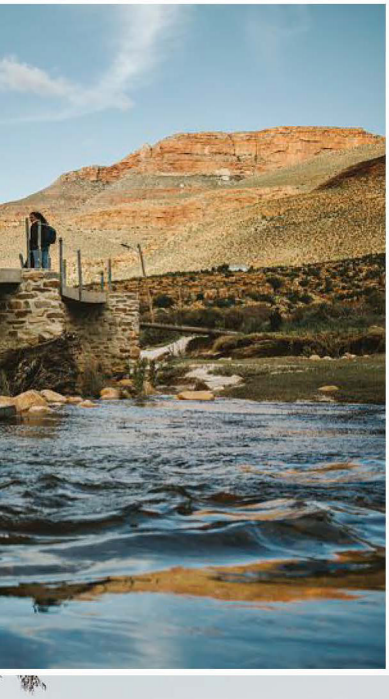
How to get there? The easiest route is from Clanwilliam, east along the R364 to where the tar stops (about 35 km). A 30 km dirt road in a fair condition will take you through the Biedouw Valley to Wupperthal.

Can I drive my sedan? The condition of the dirt road deteriorates after heavy rain so you need a vehicle with high ground clearance. From Wupperthal, you can drive south to Matjiesrivier via Eselbank and join up with the dirt road that connects Op-die-Berg and Clanwilliam, but you need a 4x4 for this route.

Is there a tourism office? There is no official office or website. Contact Barend Salomo, Joe-Ray van Sitters or Cherene van Schalkwyk for any enquiries – see the Stay Here section for their details.











STAY HERE

The old tannery has been transformed into three self-catering units that sleep 10 people in total. The units are well equipped and overlook fields and the mountains.

Kloofhuis and Palmhuis were used for guest accommodation years ago and might be reopened. Joe-Ray van Sitters and Cherene van Schalkwyk run the accommodation options in Wupperthal.

Rate: R400 per person.

Contact: 076 308 8580; 081 859 9762

EAT HERE

Lekkerbekkie Restaurant has been renovated and there's artwork on the walls made by Bloemfontein artist Albert de Jager. They serve breakfast and light lunches.

Opening times: Monday to Saturday from 8 am to 4 pm; also open after the church service on Sundays.

Contact: 064 843 9054

GO FOR A HIKE

There are lots of footpaths in the area, but no marked trails. If you're a good map reader, you can use Slingsby's map of the Cederberg. Or ask a local guide to accompany you. For hiking information, contact Barend Salomo 067 404 8840.

Alicia Erasmus offers overnight slackpacking hikes (two to five days) year-round. Contact her on 079 497 8996 or follow "Cederberg ClickClick" on Instagram and Facebook.

Live the Journey also has three slackpacking trails (50 km, 66 km and 100 km). On these hikes you'll meet the people of the outposts and you'll sleep in a tent in the veld every night. Visit livethejourney.co.za for rates and 2025 dates.

VELSKOEN FACTORY

The factory stocks a wide range of quality velskoens, boots and sandals. If something you like is sold out in your size, the shoemakers can make you a pair.

Opening times: Tuesday to Thursday from 9 am to 3 pm; Friday until 2 pm and Saturday until 1 pm.

Contact: 079 406 5449 (Shelley-Ann)
066 432 9572 (Beulah)

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WINNING PHOTO

WILLEM KRUGER

Nikon D5
Nikon 600 mm lens

WILLEM WRITES: I took this photo in Karongwe Private Game Reserve near Hoedspruit. The reserve has an underground hide next to a waterhole, which made this shot possible.

A flock of guineafowl arrived one morning around 7.15 am. Some drank while others foraged around the edge of the waterhole. This bird was looking for food under a log.

My shutter speed was 1/1 000 second, aperture f18 and ISO 3 200. I also used a fill-in flash.

TOAST SAYS: Many private reserves in South Africa and our neighbouring countries now have underground hides. Book a spot at one of these for the opportunity to take unique photos. You sit at water level in the hide, which also means you're at eye level with every animal that comes to drink.

But these hides do bring challenges as far as creativity goes because photographers often end up with similar photos. You all sit in the same place and use the same angle, with the same background. It might even be the exact same buffalo because this is where it likes to drink!

Not Willem. He's obviously a photographer who can think outside the box. Many people wouldn't even have considered a guineafowl a subject! That's the first mistake, since guineafowl are colourful (flamboyant blue-and-red heads; black-and-white plumage) and they're funny looking (that prehistoric comb).

However, it's the composition that steals the show here. This is a picture within a picture, with the log and its reflection creating the perfect frame around the guineafowl. By cropping out the top of the log (and maybe a part of the guineafowl sticking out above it), Willem focuses our attention on the bird and its reflection.

Congrats Willem, you win the camera bag. To see more of Willem's photos, visit willemkruger.wordpress.com.



MANDY MITCHELL

IG: @mandymitchell1156
Canon EOS 70D
Canon 100 – 400 mm lens

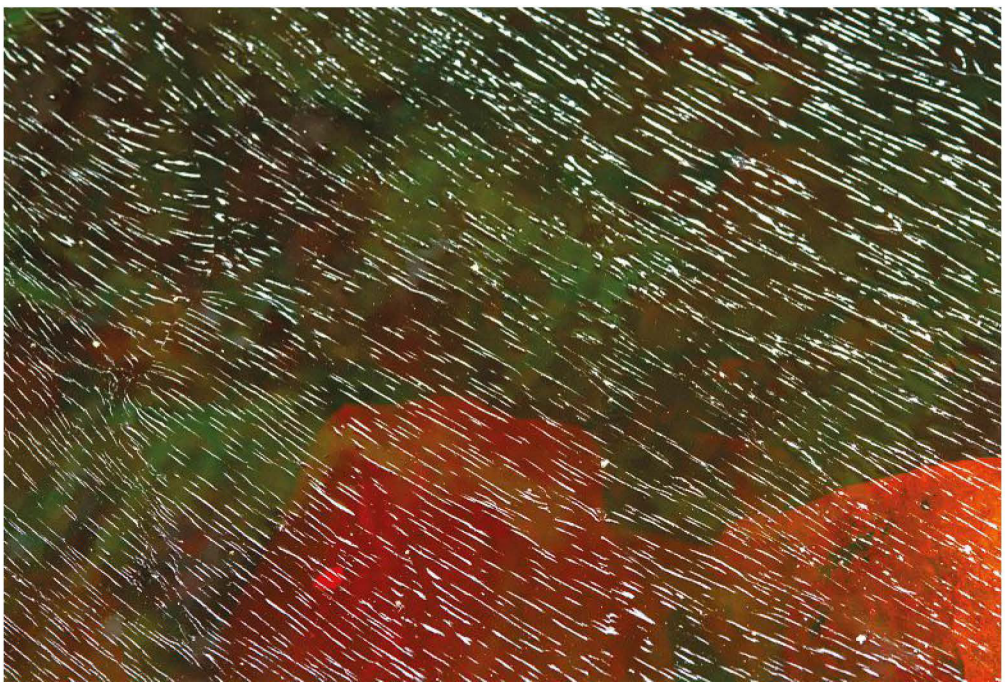
MANDY WRITES: I took this photo in the Kruger Park one winter a few years ago. I was on the bridge over the Letaba River. It's wonderful being able to get out of your car on the bridge, and the elevated perspective gives you some great photo opportunities of the animals below.

This monitor lizard was crossing a shallow stream in the riverbed and I managed to get a clear shot.

TOAST SAYS: Water monitors are often dismissed as the poor man's crocodile (Temu socks instead of a fancy pair from Woolworths…) but they're bigger than you think! They also have lots of attitude. Just look at the bow-legged stride of this guy, like a cowboy walking into a bar to look for trouble.

I like that Mandy included the entire lizard in the frame, from the head to the tip of the tail. The partial reflection in the water also gives the photo a sense of depth, as do the ripples where the lizard is walking. Photos taken from above can often appear "flat" – these elements help to combat that. The top part of the frame is empty and quiet, but you can easily crop that out to strengthen the composition.

Great capture, Mandy!



RIAAN WOLHUTER

Nikon Z7II
Nikon 24 – 50 mm lens

RIAAN WRITES: I went looking for disas in Leopard's Kloof in the Harold Porter National Botanical Garden near Betty's Bay. I found a few, but they were too high up to take photos.

The pools and waterfalls along the way were beautiful and I was fascinated by the foamy patterns on the water. I used a higher ISO of 4 000 to take this photo because the water was in shadow. The water looks like strong tea and gives a nice colour to the rocks, which I also tried to include.

TOAST SAYS: Riaan sent us a few different shots, including more conventional renditions of the pools, but this abstract shot caught my eye. Without his explanation, we wouldn't have known what we were looking at – is it a flurry of snowflakes, rain drops, a close-up of an Australian cattle dog's fur?

The tannin-coloured water turns the rocks a rusty colour and I also like the green in the top part of the photo. The white foam is crucial because it creates contrast with the dark background of the pool.

It might not be a disa, Riaan, but it's just as striking!



SAM J BASCH

Canon EOS 5D Mark II
Canon 70 – 200 mm lens

SAM WRITES: I took this photo of a buffalo in the Kruger Park a few years ago. I can't remember where exactly, but it was around midday and the cranky old bull was right next to the road.

Photography is all about light. Don't let the bright midday sun ruin your fun, work with it instead. I converted my shot to black-and-white digitally and made small adjustments like I would have in my darkroom when developing film: I lightened darker parts – like the eyes and nostrils – and darkened the light grass in the background (what film photographers used to call "dodge" and "burn").

I could have used editing software to remove the long blade of grass on the bull's body, but that feels like cheating to me. I prefer it as is.

TOAST SAYS: I agree one hundred percent, Sam. That blade of grass should stay as is. It's as much a part of the Kruger Park as the buffalo is. I don't like the "perfectly perfect" photos you see everywhere these days. Everything has its place, but to me a strong nature photo is one that shows the scene as the photographer encountered it; not one that fulfils the photographer's fantasy.

Photography has some conventions that we all understand. Most of us would have assumed that Sam took this photo in colour and converted it to black-and-white – it's the safe option. You can set a digital camera to shoot in black-and-white from the start, but then you usually won't have the option of a colour version.

The "dodge" and "burn" edit is also acceptable to me. As Sam says, if you knew your way around a darkroom, you could lighten and darken parts of the photo as you developed it. That's why the same functions in Photoshop are still called the Dodge Tool and Burn Tool – the terminology dates from back then.

Everyone has their own unique way of editing photos. Some people have more technical skills and can do more than others. You can even save a photo if you messed up the exposure. But it can go too far. That's the line for me: When your photo starts to look unnatural, you've edited too much. Put down the Red Bull; switch to rooibos tea.

Sam's photo is perfect. The black-and-white format works with the subject because buffalo are the Business section of the newspaper, not the colourful Sport pages.

HANNO PRINSLOO

Canon EOS 60D
Canon 18 – 135 mm lens

HANNO WRITES: On a recent holiday, we spent a few days near the Cape Agulhas Lighthouse. I went for a walk every evening to take photos of the lighthouse, but was never completely satisfied with the results.

On our last night, I took this photo just after 11 pm. Success! The full moon broke through the clouds and illuminated the landscape. I used an LED torch to "paint" the building with light because its side was in shadow.

I used a tripod and left the shutter open for 34 seconds. My other settings were aperture f6.3 and ISO 400. My lens was at its widest – 18 mm.

TOAST SAYS: All your hard work paid off, Hanno. I especially like the hazy appearance of the clouds because they moved during your long shutter speed.

The composition is good, too – you want to show clouds and stars because they make a night photo look more dramatic. Some people might not like the other building to the right, but it doesn't bother me.

Night photography is tricky because you can't predict what your photo will look like. The extra lighting in the foreground means we can see what's going on there, but it might be too light. I think this photo could benefit from some darkening in Photoshop or a similar editing program. Doing so will result in deeper and more saturated colours.



WERNER STRAUSS

IG: @strauss_werner
Canon EOS R5
Canon EF 100 – 400 mm

WERNER WRITES: I live in Gonubie near East London. During an early morning walk in the Gonubie Bird Sanctuary, I came across this beautiful sight: beams of light piercing the forest canopy. A great start to the day!

I used a shutter speed of 1/2 500 second, aperture f6.3 and ISO 5 000.

TOAST SAYS: Photography is filled with moments where everything suddenly falls into place. Not everyone takes their camera on their morning stroll in the neighbourhood park, but Werner did. I'm sure you could take a similar photo with your cellphone, but Werner's quality gear ensured that he captured this atmospheric scene in all its glory.

I like the different layers that strengthen the composition in the foreground and background. The weaver nests give your eye somewhere to rest, and the long vines of the climbing plants stretch vertically through the frame to connect the top and the bottom of the scene.

And then there are the beams of light that make you hit play on an Enya song in your head. Well done, Werner!





LEON VENTER
Nikon Coolpix P100

LEON WRITES: To celebrate my 70th birthday, my son Reynier took me to see Lake Kariba and Mana Pools in Zimbabwe.

We stayed at Big 5 Lodge next to Lake Kariba. The view was excellent and I had so much fun with my camera – everything I saw was worth a photo!

The scene is enhanced by the small boats that came to catch kapenta during the evening. We had these delicious fish in many different dishes, like *sheba* (stew) with pap and braai meat.

I'll always be grateful to have seen these places with my son – what a privilege.

TOAST SAYS: Leon's story is heart-warming. There are few things as precious as taking your parents somewhere on holiday. Think back to all the holidays from your childhood… Now, later in life, you can travel with your parents again but this time as an adult. These opportunities are rare and should be cherished.

Leon's photo feels exotic – the big expanse of water, the detail of the kapenta boats, the islands, the sunset and the papaya tree in the foreground. The papaya tree is probably the element in the photo that will be controversial – should it be in the frame or should it be cropped out?

I like it – it adds an unusual shape. I would have crouched down a bit so the branches of the tree were above the horizon, but since Leon is in his 70s, I'll forgive him this time.

Thanks for sharing, Leon!

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One on one

COMPILED BY **LYNNE FRASER**

In issue #197 last year, we featured our favourite finalists from the Wildlife Photographer of the Year (WPY) competition, the most prestigious of its kind on the calendar. Once the main competition was done, it was time for the WPY People's Choice Award. A selection of shortlisted images was published on the website and nature lovers from around the world were invited to vote for their favourite.

The winner was announced on 5 February: Ian Wood's surreal shot of a Eurasian badger ambling past some badger graffiti in St Leonards-on-Sea, England. Mr Badger and the four runners-up will be showcased at the WPY exhibition at the Natural History Museum in London until 29 June.

There were plenty of other cracker shots in the mix, however, including our favourites, which we've showcased here. Photographs entered into the 2025 WPY competition are currently being judged by an international panel; the winners will be announced in October. Visit nhm.ac.uk/wpy to see a gallery of all the best shots from the main competition and the People's Choice Award.



Curious connection

Nora Milligan (USA)

A chimpanzee pauses in the canopy to watch its family move across the forest floor in Loango National Park, Gabon.

On a trek through the forest, Nora's guide signalled for the group to stop near the bank of a swamp. They heard the call of a chimp first, then the leaves around them started to rustle and a family appeared. They're called the Rekambo group and they're the study subjects of researchers from the Ozouga Chimpanzee Project.

Nora couldn't believe her luck when they started to climb the nearby trees. As she peered through her viewfinder, a large male paused and looked down. The chimp craned its neck and its eyes seemed to widen, as if to get a better look.



Forest of dreams

Samuel Bloch (France)

A northern giant petrel sits on its nest at the edge of a rātā tree forest on Enderby Island, New Zealand. Northern giant petrels are large seabirds that will often fly over the waves for weeks without encountering land. For that reason, Samuel was surprised to find this one in such a woody environment.

Like many other seabirds, northern giant petrels breed on islands where there are fewer predators. Samuel shot from a distance and left quickly to avoid disturbing the bird.





Scanning the realm

Aaron Baggenstos (USA)

A puma stands on a windswept outcrop in the rugged terrain of Torres del Paine National Park in Patagonian Chile.

This puma is a symbol of hope. A successful conservation movement led to the creation of the national park, and to a rise in ecotourism in the region. This in turn has helped to reduce conflict between pumas and local sheep farmers. The farmers view pumas more positively because they're attracting tourists, which is good for income.







Icy repose

Sue Flood (UK)

A dramatic blue-grey sky complements the soft greys of a Weddell seal's pelt as it rests on an ice floe.

Sue watched the seal from aboard a rigid inflatable boat in Neko Harbour on the Antarctic Peninsula. So as not to disturb its slumber, she used a long lens to snap this serene portrait.

Weddell seals are large, with a thick layer of blubber beneath their skin. This keeps them warm above and below the icy waters of the Southern Ocean.



Date night carbonara

For the love of pasta!

Few dishes are as comforting as a bowl of pasta. Here are six recipes for everything from a quick dinner to a long *kuier*.

RECIPES & STYLING **JOHANÉ NEILSON**
PICTURES **SHELLEY CHRISTIANS**


Mac and cheese bites

Date night carbonara

Serves **2**
Preparation time **25 minutes**
Cooking time **10 minutes**

You need
- **200 g dried egg tagliatelle or spaghetti**
- **100 g pancetta strips, cut into pieces (I used the Forage and Feast pancetta from Checkers)**
- **2 egg yolks**
- **125 ml grated pecorino or parmesan**
- **lots of freshly ground black pepper**

Here's how
1 Cook the pasta in salted water until al dente – follow the directions on the packet.
2 In the meantime, fry the pancetta pieces in a big pan until crispy. You want to render the fat rather than adding extra oil so regulate the heat and don't make it too hot.
3 Beat the egg yolks, half of the cheese and ¼ cup warm pasta water (from the pot) together in a bowl and set aside.
4 Scoop the cooked pasta directly from the water into the pancetta pan and toss. Remove the pan from the heat and stir the egg yolk mixture through the pasta. The heat of the pan and the pasta will be enough to cook the egg yolks and form a silky sauce. Serve immediately with the rest of the cheese and black pepper.

Mac and cheese bites

Makes **about 20 bites**
Preparation time **40 minutes, plus time to refrigerate**
Cooking time **20 minutes for the mac and cheese; a few minutes to fry the bites**

You need
- **250 g short macaroni**
- **about 4 cups Panko breadcrumbs**
- **4 eggs, beaten**
- **vegetable oil, for frying**

For the sauce
- **3 tablespoons butter**
- **1 small onion, finely chopped**
- **3 tablespoons flour**
- **2 cups milk, warm**
- **pinch of grated nutmeg**
- **salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- **dash of hot sauce (like Tabasco)**
- **3 ml smoked paprika**
- **3 ml red chilli flakes**
- **5 ml Dijon mustard**
- **3 cups grated mature cheddar**
- **salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**

Here's how
1 Melt the butter in a pot and fry the onion until soft and glossy. Stir in the flour and fry for a minute. Gradually whisk in the milk to prevent the sauce from forming lumps. Add the rest of the ingredients except the cheese and cook for a few minutes until the sauce thickens. Stir often.
2 Remove the sauce from the heat and add the cheese bit by bit until melted.
3 Cook the pasta in salted water for one minute less than the packet recommends. Drain and add the pasta to the cheese sauce. Season to taste. Transfer the pasta to a greased, shallow oven dish and even out the mixture – try to get a layer of about 5 cm thick. Allow to cool, then refrigerate (overnight is ideal) until cooled down completely.
4 Unmould the macaroni on a chopping board and use a sharp knife to cut it into blocks. Dip each block in the breadcrumbs (press down firmly), then the egg and then the crumbs again. Repeat this step with all the blocks.
5 Fry the blocks of macaroni for a few minutes a side in the hot oil until golden brown on the outside and hot on the inside.

TIP *If you have an air fryer, spray the blocks with oil and air-fry them at 180 °C for 15 minutes. Turn the blocks over about halfway through the cooking time. The oil will add colour and flavour, even in the air fryer.*

Chicken noodle soup

Serves **6**
Preparation time **1 hour**
Cooking time **45 minutes**

You need
- **300 g chicken sausage**
- **3 tablespoons olive oil**
- **1 big onion, chopped**
- **2 carrots, finely chopped**
- **2 leeks (white parts only), chopped**
- **2 celery sticks, chopped**
- **1 clove of garlic, chopped**
- **2 cups finely chopped vegetables (like baby marrow and pumpkin)**
- **1 tablespoon tomato paste**
- **2 litres chicken stock**
- **1 tin (400 g) borlotti or small white beans, drained**
- **1 cup pasta shapes (the smaller the better)**
- **basil pesto, to serve**

Here's how
1 Remove the chicken from the sausage casing and roll it into small balls. Heat the oil in a pot and fry the meatballs until golden brown and almost cooked through. Remove the meatballs from the pan, but retain the oil.
2 Fry the onion, carrots, leeks and celery until soft and lightly browned – the longer the better for flavour. Add the garlic, the rest of the vegetables and the tomato paste and stir. Add the stock, bring to a boil and simmer for 30 minutes.
3 Add the beans and cook until hot throughout. Scoop out 2 cups of soup and blitz with a stick blender. Return the soup to the pot and add the meatballs and pasta. Simmer for 5 minutes or until the pasta and chicken are cooked. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve steaming hot with a spoonful of pesto stirred into each bowl.

Short rib ragù

Serves **about 8**
Preparation time **40 minutes, plus time to cool down and refrigerate**
Cooking time **3 hours 30 minutes**

You need
- **1 big onion, roughly chopped**
- **3 carrots, roughly chopped**
- **2 leeks (white parts only), roughly chopped**
- **2 celery sticks, roughly chopped**
- **3 cloves of garlic**
- **1,4 kg beef short ribs**
- **salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- **2 tablespoons tomato paste**
- **1 teaspoon brown sugar**
- **1 cup dry white wine**
- **2 tins (400 g each) whole tomatoes**
- **2 bay leaves (optional)**
- **about 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar**
- **600 g pappardelle pasta**
- **freshly grated parmesan, to serve**
- **freshly ground black pepper**

Here's how
1 Using a food processor, blitz the onion, carrots, leeks, celery and garlic together until you have a coarse paste. (You could also chop the ingredients very finely with a knife, but a food processor is easier.)
2 Preheat the oven to 160 °C. Heat a heavy bottomed pan or pot and sear the meat until it has a brown crust all over. Short rib is a fatty cut so try not to add extra oil. Season with salt and pepper. Remove the meat and retain about 2 tablespoons of fat in the pan.
3 Fry the vegetable mixture in the pan for a few minutes until flavoursome. Add the tomato paste and sugar and fry for a minute before you add the wine. Boil the mixture for a few minutes.
4 Use a sharp pair of kitchen scissors to cut the tinned tomatoes into smaller pieces. Add the tomatoes and their sauce to the pan. Rinse the tins with half a cup of water each and add it to the pan. Return the meat to the pan and add the bay leaves. Cover the pan and cook in the oven for about 3 hours or until the meat is tender.
5 Skim off the extra fat and remove the bones and bay leaves. Use 2 forks to flake the meat. Add the vinegar to the sauce and keep it warm.



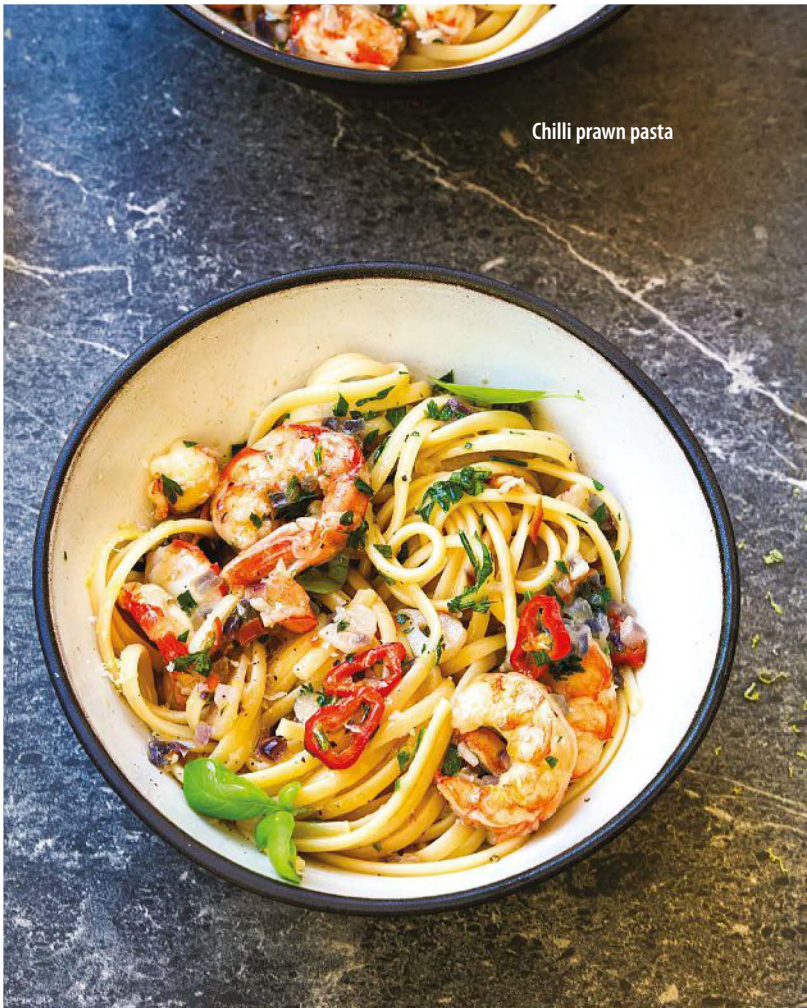
Chicken noodle soup



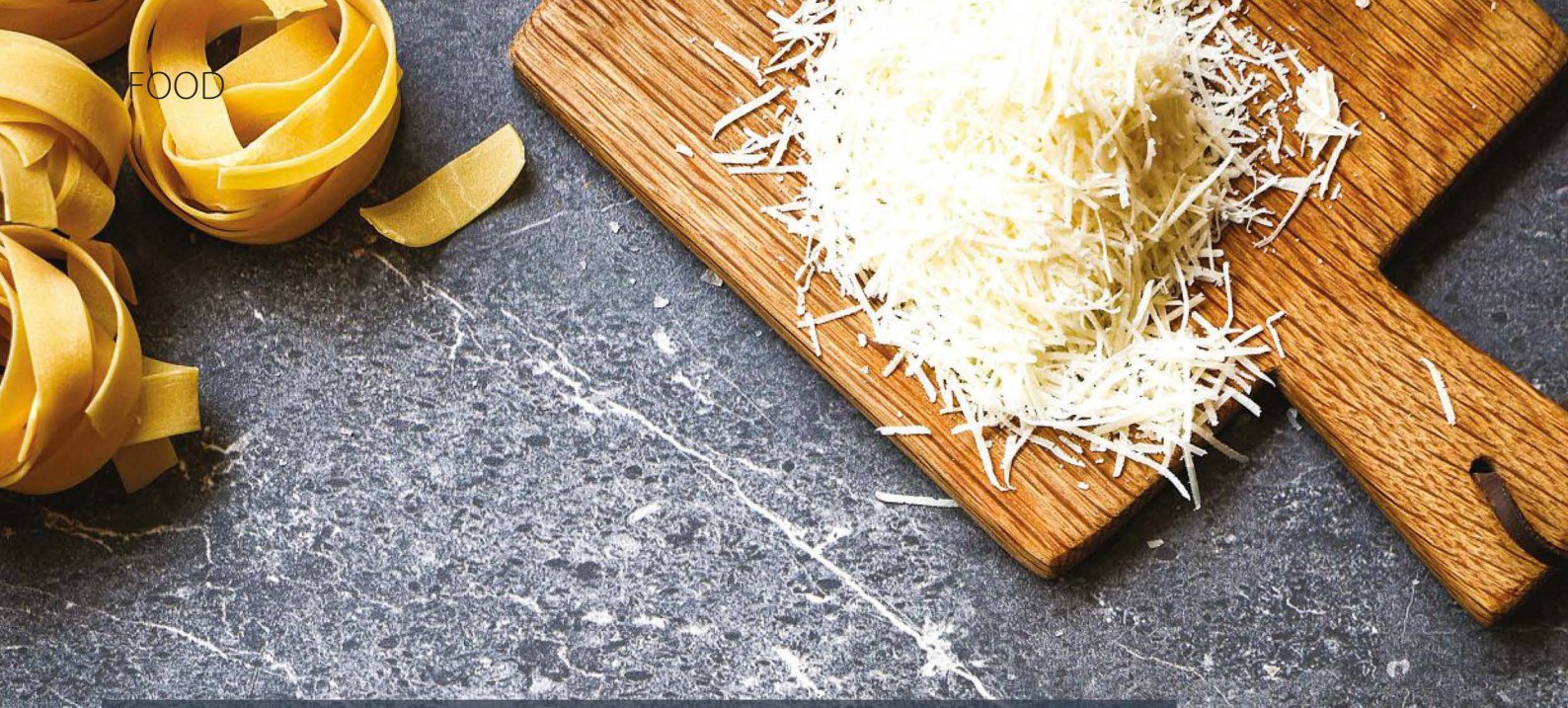
Short rib ragù



Baby marrow and feta pasta



Chilli prawn pasta



6 Cook the pasta according to the directions on the packet. Stir the pasta into the hot ragù and serve with parmesan and freshly ground black pepper.

TIP *Smaller cuts of short rib will soften sooner, but the flavour is at its best when cooked for a longer period. If you prepare the ragù the day before, roast it for 2½ hours and let it cool down in the oven. Refrigerate overnight, skim off the fat and heat before you serve.*

Chilli prawn pasta

Serves **about 4**
Preparation time **20 minutes**
Cooking time **10 minutes**

You need
- **3 tablespoons olive oil**
- **1 small red onion, chopped**
- **2 chillies, finely chopped**
- **3 cloves of garlic, thinly sliced**
- **2 cm piece of ginger, peeled and grated**
- **800 g prawn tails, shells removed**
- **400 g linguini or spaghetti**
- **3 tablespoons butter**
- **juice and grated zest of 1 lemon**
- **1 tablespoon chopped parsley**
- **salt and pepper, to taste**

Here's how
1 Heat the oil in a pan over a medium heat and sauté the onion for a few minutes until fragrant. Add the chillies, garlic and ginger and fry for a minute or two. Stir in the prawns and fry until pink.
2 Cook the pasta in salted water according to the directions on the packet until al dente. When the pasta is done, scoop it straight from the pot and add it to the prawns. Add the butter, lemon juice and zest and toss in the pan until the ingredients are mixed.
3 Scatter over the parsley (basil also works), season with salt and pepper and serve. This dish is traditionally made without cheese, but you can add parmesan if you prefer.

TIP *For an even more decadent dish, heat half a cup of cream with the prawns and leave out the butter.*

Baby marrow and feta pasta

Serves **4 as a light meal**
Preparation time **30 minutes**
Cooking time **10 minutes**

You need
- **6 big baby marrows, 3 cut into rounds and 3 finely chopped**
- **200 g cherry tomatoes**
- **1 aubergine, in small blocks**
- **2 whole unpeeled cloves of garlic**
- **¼ cup olive oil**
- **salt and pepper, to taste**
- **½ teaspoon chilli flakes**
- **150 g creamy feta**
- **300 g cooked pasta of your choice**
- **parmesan and basil, to serve**

Here's how
1 Preheat the oven to 200 °C. Mix the baby marrows, cherry tomatoes, aubergine and garlic with the olive oil and spread the vegetables out in a single layer in a deep oven pan. Season with salt, pepper and chilli flakes and bake for 30 minutes.
2 Stir the vegetables and add big pieces of feta to the pan. Drizzle some of the pan juices over the cheese. Turn on the oven's grill and roast for 10 minutes until the cheese and vegetables are charred and cooked through. Stir when needed and keep an eye on the veggies – ovens and roasting times differ.
3 Squeeze the garlic from the peel and mix with the vegetables. Add the hot pasta, stir and scatter over grated parmesan and fresh basil.

TIP *For extra texture, add toasted pine nuts or pumpkin seeds.*

COST CUTTER

Look out for National Luna's new range of cost-cutting camping fridges that are lightweight, mobile, and easy on the pocket.

Capable of reaching chest-freezer temperatures (-20ºC), these budget buys offer a far more effective solution than rotary moulded, similarly priced ice boxes.

So, if you're tired of constantly worrying about finding ice, the hassle of topping up with ice, or the frustration of your food floating in melted ice, consider National Luna's new range of affordable camping fridges.

National Luna's Travel Box range was launched in late 2023 with the release of the TB20, a low-cost, portable fridge for everyday campers, outdoor enthusiasts, and compact vehicle owners looking for a space-saving fridge/freezer.

Thanks to popular demand, the TB20 concept has expanded to three additional low-cost fridge / freezer options.





The fridges can be powered by AC or DC power supply: 220V in your home or 12V in your car. The two power options open various fridge/freezer applications, including household use, poolside entertaining, camping, fishing, boating, braaing, picnicking, and more.

Thanks to its compact size, the TB20 is ideal as a 2-fridge system, where your primary fridge stores your food and frozen goods, and the TB20 carries most of your drinks. This setup lets you pack the smaller TB20 close at hand for drinks, while significantly reducing how often you open and close your main fridge for food.





All Travel Box fridges come with a free protection jacket worth up to R1 400.

The four Travel Box models are offered in addition to National Luna's wide range of international acclaimed stainless-steel fridges.



Both the 45 and 60-litre models feature a removable divider that quickly transforms the fridge from a dual control, to a single compartment.

The new Travel Box range is available at leading outdoor stores nationwide, starting at just R3 999 while stocks last. Find your nearest dealer here:

** Prices are subject to change without notice*

Where to from here?

The world is on its head and the motoring industry is at an inflection point. How does an established market leader like Toyota navigate this rapidly changing landscape? In South Africa, a locally built hybrid SUV like the **Toyota Corolla Cross** might offer a solution…

BY PIERRE STEYN







At the beginning of each year, Andrew Kirby, president and CEO of Toyota South Africa, peers into his crystal ball and shares his insights in a "state of the nation address" known as SOMI (State of the Motoring Industry). This year's address was presented in January at the Kyalami racetrack near Johannesburg, and much of what Kirby said was more on the "cautiously" side of things and less on the "optimistic".

Vehicle sales will only reach 535 000 this year, still less than they were in 2019 before the Covid pandemic. And without sales of 600 000 per year, we won't attract foreign direct investment.

Globally, one in five car purchases these days is an electric vehicle, but without more government support so that battery-electric vehicles can be manufactured in South Africa, sold here, and also exported, we'll only fall further behind.

As things stand, predicted sales of electric cars in South Africa will only pass a 5% critical mass point in 2032 – seven years from now. Compare this to the UK and the European Union, where sales of internal combustion engine cars will be completely banned from 2030 and 2035 respectively .

Almost half of our new cars last year were manufactured in India or China. Sales of domestically produced cars have fallen, as have those from traditional supplier countries like Germany, Japan and South Korea, Kirby said. Between 2023 and 2024, the average selling price of passenger vehicles fell by 2,7% to R490 478. People are buying smaller and cheaper cars, especially sport utility vehicles, which now account for half of all our car sales.

Kirby conceded that it's in this turbulent segment where a host of new Chinese entrants offer excellent value. "The 0 to 100 km/h acceleration time is of little importance to the average buyer these days," he said. "What counts is connectivity, social media integration and the technology that's in your 'mobility device'," he said.

Against such a backdrop, it's no surprise that Toyota launched the new Toyota Corolla Cross the day before Kirby's speech. Toyota sold more than 1 800 of these cars per month in 2024, making it not only the best-selling SUV in the country, but also the best-selling hybrid vehicle.

The 1.8-litre naturally aspirated engine of the new Cross – and its CVT gearbox – won't get any petrolhead's pulse racing, but if you think of this car in Kirby's terms – as a "mobility device" – then it has been cleverly redesigned. This is most evident on the inside, where it boasts all the latest technology, on a par with the Chinese competition.

The cheapest hybrid Cross (1.8 Xs HEV) costs R494 400. Its fuel consumption on our test drive was just over 5 ℓ/100 km… about half that of its Chinese rivals. And thanks to that mighty Toyota badge on the grille, and our nationwide network of 220 dealers, the Cross looks set to dominate its segment for a while to come.

TOYOTA COROLLA CROSS 1.8 XS HEV	
Engine	1 798 cc hybrid petrol
Power	72 kW @ 5 200 rpm
Torque	142 Nm @ 3 600 rpm
Transmission	Continuously Variable Transmission (CVT)
Fuel consumption (claimed)	4,3 ℓ/100 km
Ground clearance	161 mm
Service plan	6 services/90 000 km
Service intervals	1 year/15 000 km
Warranty	3 years/100 000 km
Price	R494 400

QUICKPIC







STAY HERE

MONTPELLIER WINE ESTATE, TULBAGH

Tulbagh is the fourth-oldest town in the country, founded around 1700. It's full of heritage, as evidenced by its clutch of Cape Dutch, Edwardian and Victorian buildings. And the mountains… The town is surrounded on three sides by the Groot Winterhoek, Witzenberg and Obiekwa ranges.

So, yes, there's a lot to see and do. The horse-riding trails are particularly popular, and there's a hiking trail to a waterfall in the Waterval Nature Reserve. (Tip: Kole en Deeg in Van der Stel Street is a good stop if you're craving fresh roosterkoek. 079 489 7428)

Tulbagh also has an established wine route with many prize-winning wine estates, one of which is Montpellier. Come for an afternoon to taste wine and dine under the trees (the pizza is delicious) or book in for the weekend so you can properly explore the "valley of abundance".

There are various accommodation options. The Manor House is a stately Cape Dutch building with high ceilings, wooden floors and antique furniture. It has four rooms with double beds that can be booked separately or all together. The rooms are all B&B. The Manor House Dormitory in the same building offers a more informal stay.

I stayed in The Stable Rooms – each unit sleeps two. My room had a deep claw-foot bathtub overlooking the garden. Each room has a coffee and tea station. A stoep wraps around the units from where you can watch the sunset with a glass of Montpellier MCC in hand. (The staff were very hospitable and supplied extra towels and ice buckets with a smile. Thanks, Leon!)

Guests have access to the swimming pool between the Manor House and The Stable Rooms. There's space for the kids to play, interesting walks to do and even a shop and deli.

If you want a little more privacy – and the option of cooking for yourself – check out these cottages: Rietdakkies (in the vineyards), Oude Pastorie, Constantia Farm Cottages, The Constantia Loft and The Tree House (in a forest; perfect for a couple). As if you're not already spoiled for choice, there's also the Cellar Loft self-catering apartment and the Cellar Loft Rooms (not self-catering).

Rates: R900 – R1 200 per night for two people. Some accommodation options include breakfast. Visit the website for more details.

Where? Tulbagh is about 120 km from Cape Town along the N1 and R44. Access Montpellier via the Twee Jonge Gezellen Road.

Contact: montpellier.co.za; 082 334 4334

– Vania Jooste



Resort Guide 2025 is packed with information about 168 camping spots across our country. This special edition is a great resource to make sure you know exactly where you're going when you plan your getaways for the year.



Packing with purpose

Over the last two decades, the writers at *go!* have formed close relationships with different cars. In the 2000s and 2010s there were Toyota Condors and Renault Dusters, and now our dirt-road tourer of choice is a Suzuki Jimny. This diminutive 4x4 is very capable off-road, but packing space comes at a premium. As a result, we've discovered some great gear to make life easier when travelling in a small car.

BY PIERRE STEYN AND SOPHIA VAN TAAK



Pierre's three-door Jimny has taken him to the Richtersveld and all the way to Kasane in Botswana. On his roof rack, you'll mostly find Frontrunner and Tentco products, with a National Luna camping fridge inside.

RONEL STEYN

FRONTRUNNER SLIMLINE II ROOF RACK

Even with the back seats folded down, there's still very little storage space in the back of a three-door Jimny – especially when your 35 ℓ camping fridge (see p 88) takes up almost half the space! It's no wonder almost all Jimny owners who are serious about gravel travel use a roof rack.

The most popular rack is this Frontrunner Slimline II – and it's available for lots of other vehicles, too. The Jimny one is as long and wide as the roof, and it's easy to assemble and mount yourself.

It does weigh a fairly hefty 31,5 kg, so if your last name isn't Etzebeth, you're going to need help picking it up and bolting it on. Once it's on, however, there's space for jerry cans, ammo boxes and camp beds.

Please don't overload your roof. Every car's roof has a carrying capacity – check the owner's manual. If you put too much weight up there, you can damage your car and affect its road-holding capability.

R10 850 frontrunneroutfitters.com

FRONTRUNNER 20 L JERRY CAN

Did we mention that the Jimny is small? This also applies to its fuel tank, which has a capacity of only 40 litres (three-door and five-door models). If you want to tackle the sandy roads of a place like Mabuasehube in Botswana, you'll need to carry extra fuel.

That's where the famous jerry can (a German military design that has hardly changed since World War II) will come to your rescue.

This one is made of 0.8 mm steel with a petrol-resistant enamel coating. Two cans fit neatly on their sides in a Frontrunner "tray", which is sold separately (R1 190) – you simply bolt it to your roof rack. Now you can clamp your jerry cans and secure them with a lock. A jerry can funnel (R65 from Frontrunner) makes it easy to pour fuel from the can into your tank.

R599 frontrunneroutfitters.com

TENTCO AMMO BOX

A good ammo box is an indispensable piece of equipment on a long-distance road trip. You can keep everything together that belongs together, and the box protects your stuff from bumps and dust. You can stash the boxes in the cabin or put them on the roof. (Remember, not too heavy or too many!)

We like this Tentco ammo box: The clips are strong, it's easy to carry and you can stack multiple boxes on top of each other. The corners are reinforced with a double wall, there's a place to attach straps, and the lid has channels that allow water to escape.

R215 tentco.co.za





Sophia recently road-tripped through Namibia in a five-door Jimny. This camping equipment from OZtrail was a pleasure to use and compact enough to easily fit in the boot.

NATIONAL LUNA 35 L FRIDGE

If you've ever camped in the Kgalagadi in summer, you'll know that a portable fridge is absolutely indispensable. It can make the difference between a wonderful holiday and the start of divorce proceedings…

National Luna is a South African company with more than 35 years of outdoor experience – they sell a wide range of fridges and freezers for cars of every size. This 35 ℓ model is one of the smallest – it's suitable for two people. It's an excellent fridge and fits perfectly in the back of my Jimny.

It weighs just 21 kg, has a single compartment with three baskets, a digital thermostat, and it automatically switches between AC and DC power supply. The lid can be opened lengthwise or width-wise (very handy in such a small car, especially if you don't have a built-in sliding system).

You can download the NL Connect application on your phone to monitor your fridge at all times via Bluetooth. Although you can't carry half an eland inside, it will keep your beer cold and your marriage intact.

I *do* have my eye on the brand-new dual-compartment 35 ℓ fridge and freezer (the first of its kind in the world) due to be introduced in the next few weeks by National Luna.

R10 000 outdoorwarehouse.co.za

TENTCO AMMO BOX BAG (2 BOXES)

Dust and sand are demons that will infiltrate everything on the roof rack unless you've properly covered it with a protective layer. Do you really want to knock the dust off your undies every morning, or dip a sandy rusk in your coffee?

Tentco has a variety of bags and covers for ammo boxes, ranging from bags for one box up to eight boxes, all made from tough ripstop canvas. This bag for two ammo boxes closes with a strong zip and Velcro tabs; the inside is lined with PVC; and there are loops so you can securely fasten the bag with straps.

R610 tentco.co.za



TITAN CAMPING CHAIR

It's not just the high back, wide armrests and cushioned canvas that make this a very comfortable camping chair, the Titan also has all kinds of features to make your life easier. Next to your right arm is a container for your drink, and next to your right leg are four pouches, two of which are made of soft mesh so your sunglasses and phone screen won't get scratched.

But just like when Ox Nché scrums down, it's the left side that will demand your attention: You'll find a hanging cooler bag here where two more beers can cuddle up, with a bottle opener attached to an elastic band. Yup, you don't have to get up for anything ever again. And with a carrying capacity of 250 kg, it will easily be able to hold Ox – with Bongi on his lap.

R1 150 oztrailstore.co.za



EASY FOLD STRETCHER

This bed just fits across and behind a Jimny's front seats. It's a little weighty (10,2 kg) but the steel frame won't collapse under you, and it's easy to set up: Just give it a shake, make sure the legs are fully unfolded, and Bob's your uncle.

The bed has a carrying capacity of 150 kg and the frame is designed in such a way that there's no crossbar at the top or bottom that would press against a taller person's head or heels.

It's 2 m long, 80 cm wide and this particular model is 42 cm high – good news for anyone with creaky knees. There are two mesh bags and a zip pocket for your iPad on the side, and a small hammock underneath the canvas for extra storage space.

R1 900 oztrailstore.co.za





IRONSIDE FOLDABLE TABLE



With a surface area of 50 x 100 cm, this table is perfect for two people. The telescopic steel legs can be adjusted to three heights: 45 cm (for when you're sitting flat on the ground), 62 cm (as a side table) and 71 cm (to use with chairs).

It has a whopping load capacity of 200 kg so it will easily handle a gas stove and a few other items around it. The polypropylene top is easy to wipe clean.

R1 000 oztrailstore.co.za

GENESIS II 4V TENT

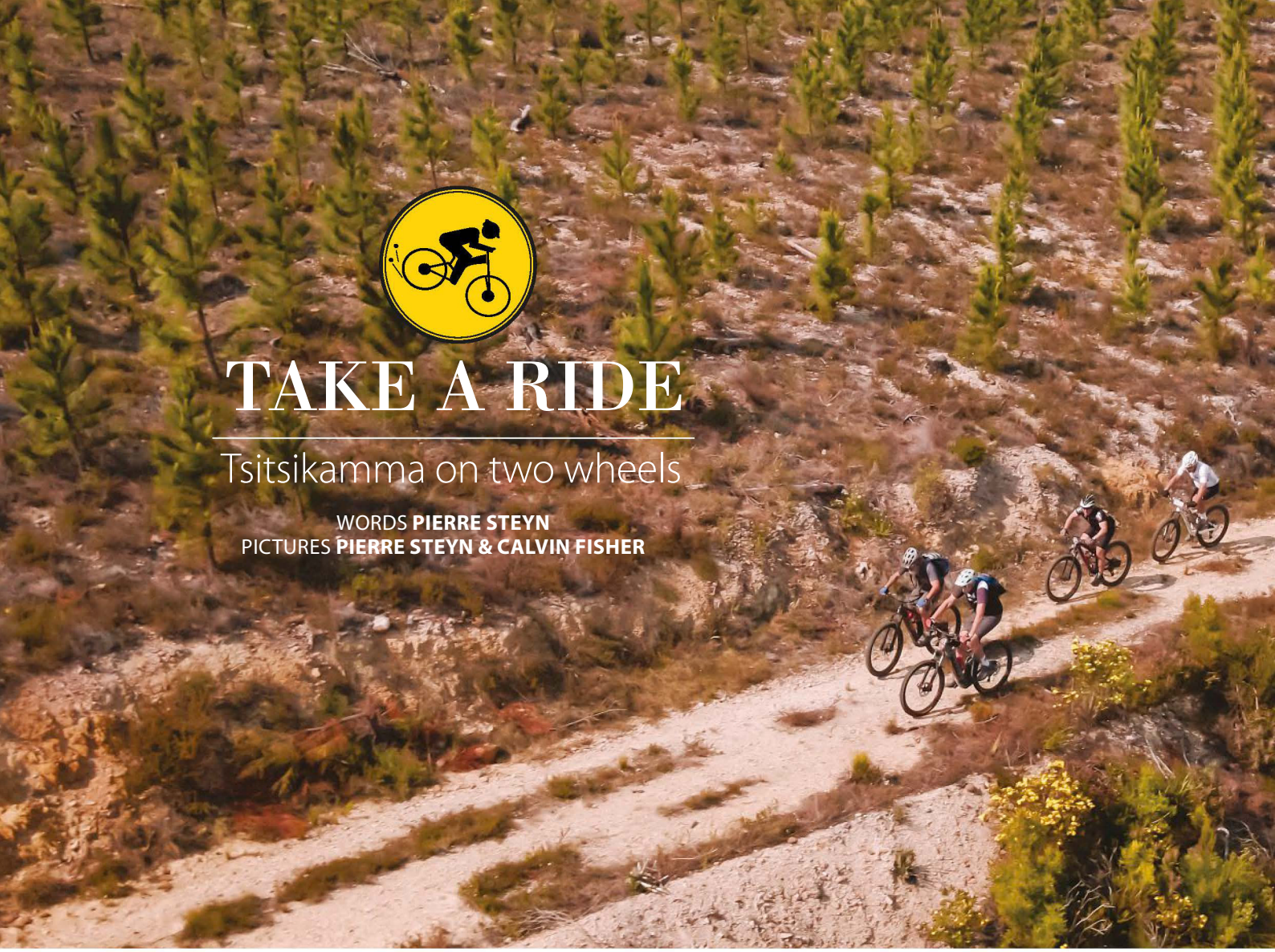


This dome tent survived two fierce thunderstorms while I was in Namibia. There were no leaks at all – not through the floor or through one of the seams – and the well-placed guy ropes kept everything firmly anchored.

It's a lightweight tent that's much easier to pitch than its canvas counterparts. The dome is made entirely of bug-proof mesh (excellent ventilation!), which quickly hooks up to two criss-cross fibreglass poles. The fly sheet has a door at the front and at the back, and a large, zipped window on each side. The tallest point is 1,8 m high and the floor space measures 2,2 x 2,4 m – big enough for two camping beds to fit with about half a metre of space in between.

The small vestibule in front of the one door adds about another metre of zipped storage space. Packed away in its bag, it's only a bit fatter than a rugby ball (and about 60 cm long), and weighs just under 6 kg.

R2 200 oztrailstore.co.za



TAKE A RIDE

Tsitsikamma on two wheels

WORDS **PIERRE STEYN**
PICTURES **PIERRE STEYN & CALVIN FISHER**

South Africa loves mountain biking, especially on the Garden Route. There are multiple stage races in this part of the world, each of which promises beautiful riding along jeep tracks and single tracks through the forests and along the coast. But these races are pricy – and you have to be fit.

What if you could ride the same routes, often on private land, with your family or friends? We're talking leisurely pedalling here – no rushing from one water point to the next, chewing energy bars and sucking gels.

That's the idea behind Bhejane 4x4 Adventures' new three-day Tour de Tsitsikamma, which covers roughly 150 km from the village of Thornham in the Eastern Cape to Nature's Valley in the Western Cape. It's a guided mountain-bike adventure where your luggage is transported between overnight camps, all your meals are prepared and you sleep in a proper bed in a dome tent.

This is a holiday, not exercise!

Our group of cycling friends meets the Bhejane team at Firefly Falls, an eco-friendly lodge in The Crags, east of Plettenberg Bay. While bike chains are lubed and tyre pressures checked, Vermaak Senosi, Bhejane's bush chef extraordinaire, conjures up the first of a series of tasty dinners. Tonight, it's lamb chops, boerewors and salad, with a healthy scoop of pap and sauce.

The next morning after breakfast, we get the chance to pack a lunchbox of sandwiches and fruit, then riders and bikes are transported to the start point – a farm road south of Thornham, about a half-hour drive away. From here, we'll ride back the way we came, west in the direction of Storms River.

On the left, on the seaward side, there are green pastures where Friesian cows chew the cud. To the right, plantations of pine trees stand guard like lines of soldiers on parade. In front is an undulating jeep track that gets swallowed by one of the pine plantations a few kilometres further, only to spit us out again onto a cliff path high above the Indian Ocean.

If you pay attention, and you're lucky enough, you'll see dolphins playing in the waves and whales lolling in the deeper water. Listen carefully and you might even hear them slapping their tails on the surface.

I take a few sips of water at a lookout point over the mouth of the Storms River. I eat a sandwich and drop my saddle in preparation for a fast descent down the first of three iconic South African mountain passes that we'll traverse – one on each day of the tour.

Storms River Pass is a steep, winding gravel road through the Tsitsikamma section of the Garden Route National Park. From the start of the descent to the bottom at the bridge over the river, it takes barely four minutes, during which time you can easily reach speeds of 50 km/h and faster. The climb up the other side is a different story… It takes about 20 minutes for the hardy







Clockwise from far left: On the Tour de Tsitsikamma you ride through MTO forestry's pine plantations as well as through indigenous forests. Before you descend the Groot River Pass into Nature's Valley, take a moment to soak up the view. Also pause on the low-water bridge over the Storms River to gather strength for the steep climb out.

few who don't have electric bikes.

At least we're in the shade of yellowwood and stinkwood trees as we grind our way to the top. I hear the call of a red-chested cuckoo as sunlight flits through the canopy.

After the climb, we ride into Storms River Village just outside the park boundary. If you visit Storms River, you absolutely have to stop for a milkshake at Marilyn's 60's Diner. That's what we do, to celebrate having conquered the first 20 km or so.

There's still a solid 28 km ride ahead, but nobody is stressed. Did I mention this tour is not a race? We carry on sipping our milkshakes.

Eventually we roll out of Storms River Village, across the N2 and head north, towards the mountains that soon fill the horizon. Rocky single track through indigenous forest is interspersed with smooth plantation service roads covered in pine needles. When we reach a small river, we stop and swim before we continue pedalling. No one here is chasing a medal.

By 3 pm we reach the Tsitsikamma Mountain Bio Camp: five tents and a deck on the edge of a pine forest with a magnificent view of the Tsitsikamma range.

Bhejane has built two of these "bio camps" on MTO forestry land: This one north of Coldstream on the upper reaches of the Lottering River, and a coastal camp overlooking the mouth of the Bloukrans River.

"The idea with the bio camps is to have as little impact on the environment as possible," says Frank Carlisle, owner of Bhejane. "The decks and scaffolding are built with wood from the plantations, and the tents, kitchen, bathroom and showers can be easily erected and removed. We deliberately keep the camps small, with only five tents each, giving us a maximum of 10 people per tour."

It's still nice and early, so we take a five-minute walk to a deep, dark pool in the Lottering River. The water is ice cold and a shock to the system, but not in an unpleasant way. Later, while some of my cycling buddies still bob around like otters, I lie stretched out on a warm, flat rock with a beer in my hand. We talk about the day's ride and that feeling of being high on the cliff; the Storms River descent…

How wonderful to think that we'll do it all again tomorrow!

Day 2 is the longest day of the tour: 66 km with 820 m of elevation gain. Luckily the elevation comes later: We start with a gradual descent on gravel roads – a leisurely hour or so back to the cliffs on the coast.

After this, we ride for kilometres along more cliff paths. To the left, below and just out of sight, lie some of the Otter Trail's famous overnight stops, such as the Scott and Oakhurst huts. Seen from up here on my bike, I'm very glad I don't have to cross the Elandsbos and Lottering rivers on foot with a heavy pack.

And you don't have to wrestle through the Bloukrans River either… But you do turn inland here to get across higher up via the Bloukrans Pass, which also takes us into the Western Cape. Bloukrans is a tarred pass that was closed to cars after flooding and rockfalls years ago. The damaged sections, especially on the Eastern Cape side, were never repaired. But cyclists are still allowed to ride it – what a pleasure!

It's an adrenaline rush as you fly down, swooping around the bends through the forest to the river, where it's time for another swim next to the bridge.

All cyclists know the old adage: What goes down must go up. As I climb out of the pass I start thinking about what I could sell (air fryer, piano, leather sofa…) to be able to afford an e-bike. At the top, however, it's only 5 km of smooth gravel to the Bloukrans Bio Camp. This camp is also on the edge of a pine plantation and in front of each tent is an uninterrupted view of the ocean. To the east are the cliffs of the Garden Route National Park; to the west I can just make out the Robberg Peninsula beyond Plett.

We celebrate with perfectly cooked, medium-rare sirloin, eaten on our laps. Thank you, Vermaak!

By Day 3 – a short "play day" (31 km) down to Nature's Valley along single-track trails through the forest – you and your saddle have become firm friends. Just as well, because the spoils don't stop simply because it's the last day.

And no – I'm not talking about the burgers and Windhoeks at Blue Rocks Café & Grill in Nature's Valley; the real spoil is the rapid descent of the Groot River Pass. It's so decadent, probably because you know you don't have to pedal back out of the pass (the Bhejane van is waiting at the restaurant), but it's more than that: It's a huge privilege to ride through an ancient forest where Knysna turacos and woodpeckers have been hiding for centuries; where your days are coloured by the emerald green of the forest, the blue of the sea and the tea-brown of the river water.

After that Windhoek, you might think it wouldn't have been too bad to pedal out of the pass after all. Maybe even do the whole tour all over again? And before you know it, you're offering your services to be an (unpaid) guide on the next Tour de Tsitsikamma…

Pierre joined as a guest of Bhejane 4x4 Adventures.

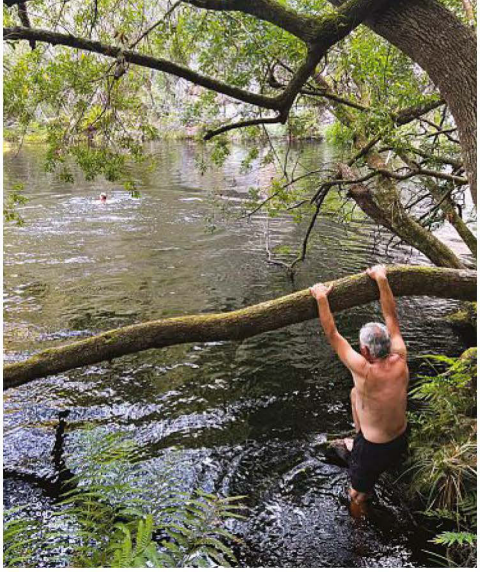












Clockwise from far left: This is a relaxed tour with plenty of time to chill or swim in a river pool. Bush cook Vermaak Senosi is a legend on Bhejane's tours! You'll want to take plenty of photos on this tour – whether from a viewpoint high above Storms River Mouth or from the deck of your tent looking out over the Tsitsikamma. In the evening, you hang out with your fellow riders and guides (like Frank Carlisle pictured here, owner of Bhejane) while you enjoy a delicious plate of food.



KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

How does it work? All your luggage is transported between the overnight camps. E-bikes are welcome and provision is made to recharge bike batteries at night. You spend the night in a spacious dome tent on a proper single bed, and there's hot water in the showers.

Cost: R8 000 per person sharing. This includes three nights' accommodation, three meals a day and two professional guides.

What do I need? A regular mountain bike or an e-MTB. Some sections are just too rocky for gravel bikes. You also need a helmet, cycling clothes, a hydration pack and puncture repair stuff. The riding isn't technical – it's a leisurely tour – but having some mountain-bike experience won't hurt. For the camping part, pack a headlamp, a power bank to charge your cellphone (you won't find signal everywhere, but you're going to want to take photos) and your own drinks and snacks. Pack swimming gear and comfortable clothes that you can wear in the camp at night. Bring a warm jacket and a beanie.

Dates:

9 – 11 May 2025

16 – 18 May 2025

13 – 15 June 2025

16 – 18 June 2025

Groups of 6 to 10 people who want to set their own dates, or just book the campsites, can contact Bhejane directly.

More information: 082 724 0442; bookings@bhejane.com; tourdetsitsikamma.co.za

Other routes? Bhejane has partnered with MTO forestry for this particular multi-day cycle tour. There are several cycling trails if you're keen on just a few hours' riding in the area. Visit sanparks.org and mtotrails.com.







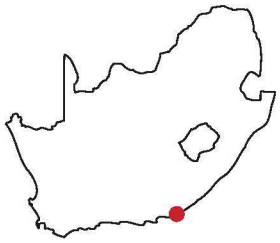
Kariega is the main beach in Kenton-on-Sea. It boasts Blue Flag status, and has life guards on duty.

Easy in the EC

Kenton-on-Sea is a holiday town between the Kariega and Bushmans rivers. It's a place for walking barefoot and looking for hidden beaches, and where you might see a lion swimming across the river….

WORDS & PICTURES **LUCILLE BOTHA**





Opposite page, from top left: Mark Crandon opened The Bakery in 2013, and his baked goods soon became a local hit. Horns Up bush pub is only open in December and January, but it's the best spot to watch the water-skiers' antics. Dale Cunningham organises the annual Seagull Regatta on the Kariega River. He owns 46 of these British outboard engines, which sound a bit like lawnmowers when they go at full throttle. The Kariega River winds like an aqua snake through dense vegetation on the riverbanks. This is the view from Stanley's Restaurant, about 4 km outside Kenton-on-Sea. The bowls club is one of the activities on offer in Kenton.

"Kenton? Oh, in Knysna? Don't you mean Kempton Park?"

No, man! I'm talking about Kenton-on-Sea! It's a holiday spot about halfway between Gqeberha and East London, near Port Alfred on the R72.

"We don't have many activities for tourists, but we have beautiful beaches, natural scenery and game reserves nearby with elephants, lions and rhino," says Jo Wilmot, who grew up here. "We offer the best of the bush and the beach."

Long before the Butt family, of Settler descent, built their farmhouse in Kenton in the late 1800s and people came with their ox wagons to outspan on the farm, the Khoi lived on the beaches and along the rivers, as evidenced by shell middens in the Dry Bones Valley between Middle Beach and the Bushmans River mouth.

All these years later and Kenton is still a small town, mostly because of its geography. It's wedged into a 2,5 km space between the Bushmans and Kariega rivers on the sides, and the Indian Ocean and R72 above and below.

After an early morning swim, you can head to The Bakery for a coffee and freshly baked ciabatta. In the afternoon, you can go to the Bushmans River mouth with your cooler bag to watch the sunset.

"Kenton is a laid-back place," says another local, physiotherapist Margaret Morrell, who has lived in Kenton with her husband Dave, a retired anaesthesiologist, for 25 years. "We're known as the 'Barefoot Capital'. No one is pretentious, even though some of the residents were VIPs in their previous lives."

Covid and Claudius

No one can say for sure how many people live or holiday in Kenton-on-Sea, but the general guess is around 5 000. The town has shed its sleepy image over the last few years, with new restaurants and shops opening their doors.

Mark Crandon opened The Bakery in 2013. He said goodbye to the business world and travelled for a few months. In Switzerland, he fell in love with artisan bread and cheese and taught himself how to bake. When he came back to South Africa, there was only one place he wanted to live – the town where he'd spent his childhood holidays. At the time, there was no good bakery in Kenton and people had to fight for the last bread rolls in the grocery store. That sealed the deal. These days, most people in Kenton visit Mark's bakery at least once a day for a chat or a treat.

"Back then, the holiday season carried businesses through the rest of the year," he says. "Covid changed everything. Many people spent lockdown in their holiday homes and realised they could live here and travel to Joburg or Cape Town when necessary. Makhanda has some of the best private schools in the country and it's only a 40-minute drive away. Some young families decided to move here permanently."

Now the town bustles year-round, but it's not so bad that you'll struggle to find a parking. (Everything is on steroids come December, of course.)

"It's a wonderful community and no matter what your interests are, you'll find something to do here. We have a bridge club, a tennis club and a bowls club. It even appeals to introverts because I can take my dogs and enjoy the peace and quiet on the beach," says Mark.

Mark is also the driving force behind Kenton on Whisky ("Kenton on Whisky" on Facebook), a local whisky tasting group, and the Kenton 100 (kenton100.co.za), a running event held in April where mad people run 100 miles (160 km) in 16 km laps. The cut-off time is 36 hours.

"Years ago, the bakery adopted a stray dog and we called him Claudius. He often escaped and I had to run after him through the streets. Claudius showed me all the small side streets and that's how the Kenton 100 route was born," says Mark.

Beach to bush

The best weather conditions start from January onwards, say those in the know, with the "magical months" of April and May as highlights on the calendar.

Early morning, before 6 am in summer, you'll find the Wave Warriors in the water. This group of seniors go out in the waves with their bodyboards every day. Margaret the physio is one of them.

"We've called ourselves the Silver Turtles, the Recycled Teenagers and the Wrinkley's in the past, but Wave Warriors stuck," she says. "Some of us are fair-weather members, but the rest of us swim every day. There are a few shrieks and screams, but we go in. The swim, the walk, being outside... It sets you up for the day. You don't even realise you're exercising because you're having so much fun. We've gotten to know each other really well over the years and we care for each other."

Kenton's short coastline between the rivers packs a punch. You can swim in the calm




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Right: Hire a boat to go on an early morning or sunset cruise up the Kariega River, where you're almost certain to see antelope like these nyala.

Opposite page, from the top: The Sandbar restaurant floats on the Bushmans River. It's a great place to eat, fish and look for birds like goliath heron, whimbrel and oystercatcher. Old engines are brought out of retirement for the Seagull Regatta, where they get to show off once more. Pop in at The Daily Shop in Bushmans for anything you might have forgotten back home.

river mouths or brave the waves. There are a number of beaches close together and the trick is to read the wind. If there's a westerly wind, go to the Kariega Lagoon; if it's blowing east, head to the beach next to the Bushmans River Lagoon.

When Jo Wilmot talks about the "bush", she's talking about nearby Big Five reserves like Sibuya and Kariega, and also Addo Elephant National Park on the other side of the Bushmans River.

After a morning spent on a Blue Flag beach, it's a Kenton tradition to head up one of the rivers by boat for an afternoon of skiing and fishing, and a sundowner at Horns Up, a bush bar on the banks of the Kariega.

Fish-eagles call over the roar of boat engines. You're guaranteed to see a herd of nyala or a few bushbuck, and sometimes a giraffe will stick its long neck through the candelabra trees on the riverbank.

Elephants come down to swim and apparently someone once saw a cheetah paddling across. On the opposite bank, she called to her cubs and they all swam back and disappeared into the bush. More recently, a lion swam across the Bushmans River! (*What are they drinking at Horns Up? – Ed.*)

Hear the Seagulls roar

There's one day of the year that wild animals aren't the greatest spectacle on the water, and that's when the annual Seagull Regatta is held in December.

Although they're noisy and unreliable, Seagull outboard engines touch a nostalgic nerve. And if Dale Cunningham gets his way, Kenton-on-Sea will soon make it into the Guinness World Records for hosting the biggest Seagull Regatta in the world.

In only six years, the regatta has grown from seven vessels to 247. The Seagull engines power anything that can float for 10 km, to see who is king of the Kariega.

"There are Seagull Regattas in the UK, New Zealand, Bermuda and Australia, but ours is the biggest in the world by far," says Dale, who organises the race from his game farm, Cob Bay.

The event attracts about 2 000 spectators, who stay for the big *jol* afterwards.

"It's a fun day for Eastern Cape locals and other like-minded people. The band plays golden oldies – you know, songs where you can actually understand the words..."

It takes the winner about an hour and 20 minutes to complete the race, while the stragglers can take up to three hours. Many participants don't finish and rely on other boats to tow them home.

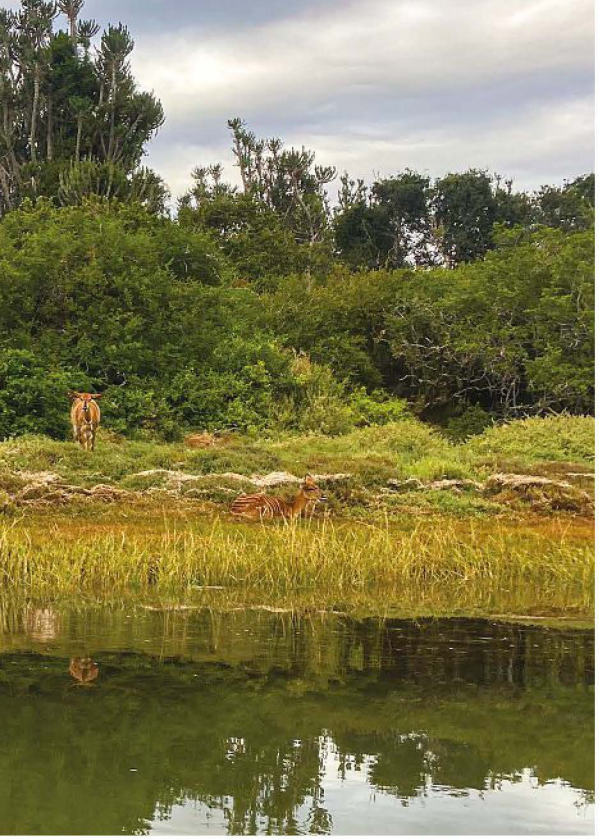
"The engines are finicky and need constant love and care, but people from my era grew up with these things and we've stayed loyal. Almost everyone has a story about a Seagull engine," says Dale.

GO OUT ON THE WATER

If you don't have your own boat, book a boat cruise with Outdoor Focus (✆ 071 197 0971). Rates from R2 300 for eight people for a two-hour cruise.

SEAGULL REGATTA

A fun gathering in December to raise funds for the Kenton community. Contact Dale Cunningham for more info (✆ 083 655 5597) or check out @kenton_seagull_regatta on Instagram.









Visit the neighbouring village

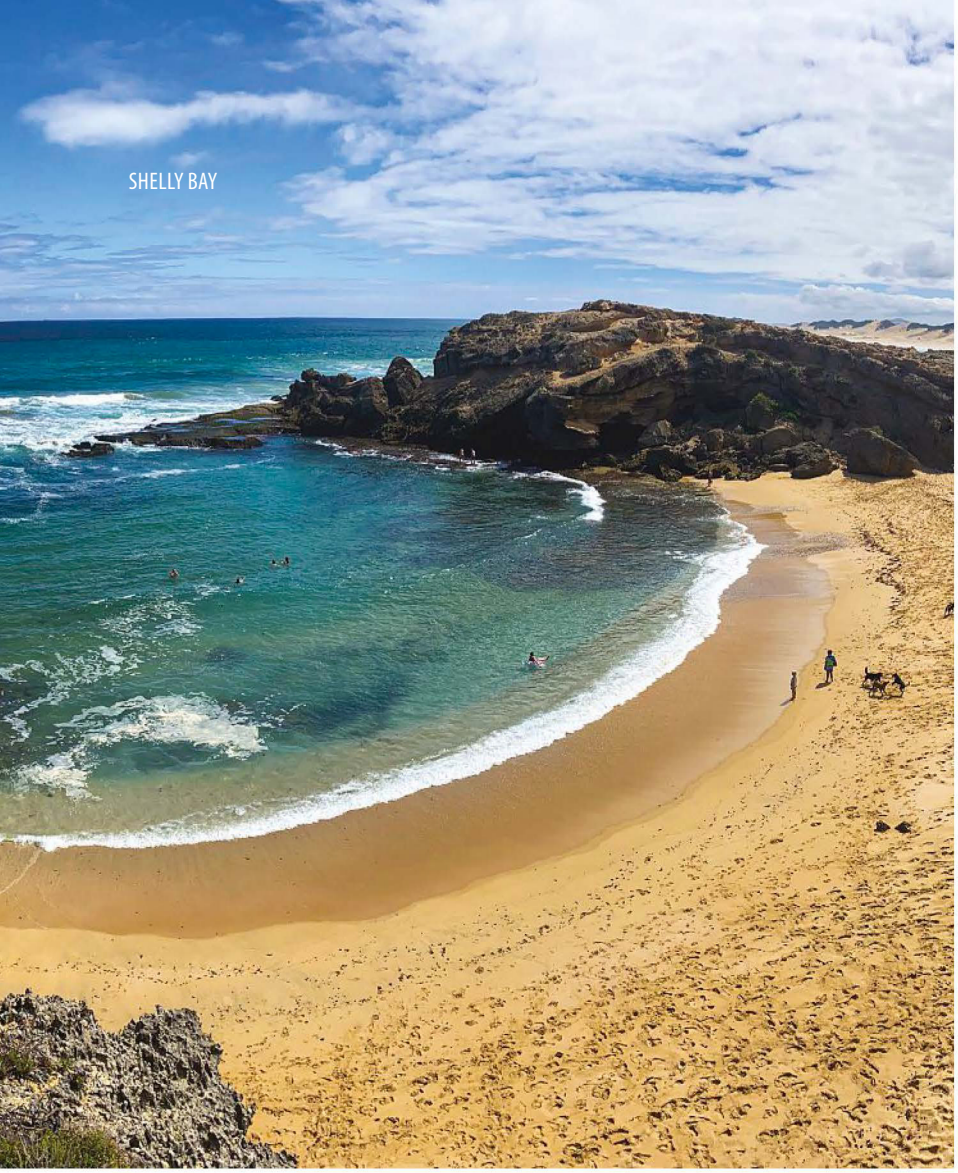
When people talk about Kenton, the neighbouring *dorp* of Bushmans, on the western bank of the Bushmans River, is often mentioned in the same breath. Its official name is Boesmansriviermond, and it has quaint streets full of milkwood and coral trees. You'll find a Dutch Reformed church in Bushmans, packed during Christmas services, and The Daily Shop, an old-school general dealer where you can buy everything from dog food to ginger beer and fishing tackle. The daily pace here is a slow stroll, not a run.

In the late 1400s, during his journey around Africa, Bartolomeu Dias planted a *padrão* – a stone cross with the Portuguese coat of arms – on the beach about 6 km from present-day Bushmans. You can feel the Portuguese vibes at the Post House Grill (✆ 071 868 0114), which serves Mozambican and Portuguese cuisine.

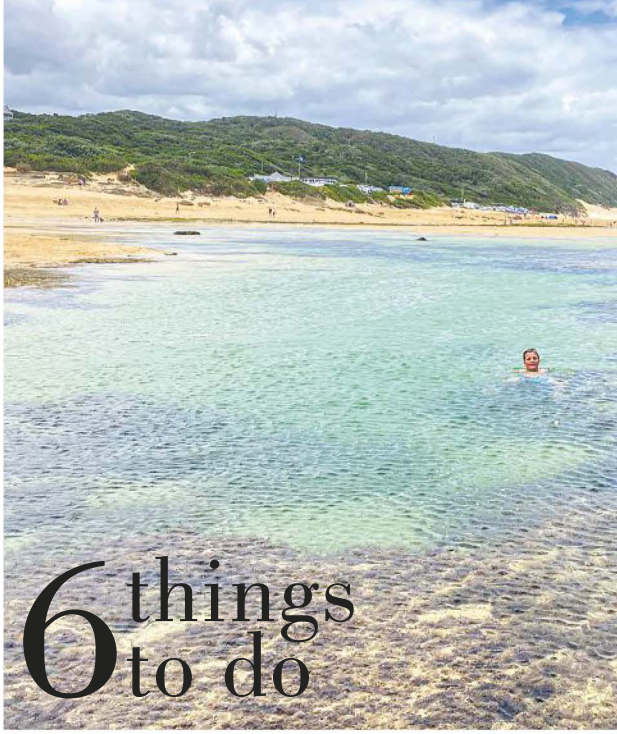
Kenton's true character is found in its people, who often speak their own language – a mixture of English, Xhosa and Afrikaans.

"We don't get everything right, but we live a gentle life," says Jo as she talks about all the charity efforts in the community. There's a hashtag: #KentonCares

"Even our weather is gentle," she says. "We don't have scorching days – our summers are moderate. We don't get those killer south-westerly winds that blow for weeks on end. It's beautiful here and life is simple. I truly believe this is the heart of South Africa."



SHELLY BAY



6 things to do

Go to the beach

Kenton's main swimming beach is at the mouth of the Kariega River. Play in the waves or in the sheltered lagoon. About a kilometre towards Bushmans is Middle Beach, where deep-sea boats launch and fishermen cast their lines for elf from a rock shelf called Whales Back. Kids play with fishing nets in the low-tide pools.

Blue Pool, a natural tidal pool, is nearby where you can swim or snorkel. Walk further along the rocks and you'll reach Mermaid Pool, another natural tidal pool. You'll also see what's left of one of Kenton's beloved landmarks, Carriage Rock. For centuries, this rock rose up next to the water and made many photographers reach for their cameras, but the top got blown over during a storm in 2023.

The next beach is Shelly Bay, which has a grim origin story. This is where Marcella (Shelly) Marinelli, an 18-year-old pilot, died in a plane crash in 1997. Shelly Bay is a beautiful cove at the foot of steep cliffs. From the parking area in Westbourne Road, you trek over a dune, along a path through a forest, and through Dry Bones Valley. Or you can wait until low tide, when it's easier to reach Shelly Bay from Carriage Rock or the Bushmans River mouth. You'll still have to climb a bit.

There's a cave in Shelly Bay that you can explore at low tide, and you can jump into the sea from the rocks. Be careful, though. The waves can be rough and the currents are strong.

Around the corner is the Bushmans River mouth, with a sprawling beach that's packed in the late afternoon when people arrive with their picnic baskets and sundowners to watch the sunset and end the day with a dip.



BUSHMANS RIVER MOUTH

Take a hike

At low tide, you can walk across the Kariega Bridge and along the beach to the even tinier village of Kasouga.



BLUE POOL

Look for dolphins in the waves. Ask someone to pick you up in Kasouga (it's about 11 km from Kenton) in case the tide turns and you can't walk back.

You can also walk west along the beach from the Bushmans River mouth to the Dias Cross. Bring flip-flops because the boardwalk to the viewpoint gets very hot in the middle of the day. It's about a 10 km hike there and back, but you can swim along the way.

The poor man's game drive

Game viewing is not limited to the river. The DR1950 is a public district road that runs from the Salem/Makhanda Road (R343) through Sibuya Game Reserve to Southwell Road.

You can drive a circular route from the R72, but the stretch through Sibuya usually has the most sightings.

It's called the "poor man's game drive" and the road is not really maintained, so go in a 4x4 with high ground clearance. Sightings of impala, zebra, elephant, giraffe, warthog and wildebeest are almost guaranteed, especially around the low-water bridge over the Kariega.

Ride a dune

The high dunes between Kariega Beach and Middle Beach are the perfect place to have fun on a sandboard. The kids will love flying down the dunes. (But first they have to climb to the top!) You can buy a sandboard in Kenton. Tip: Experienced sandboarders wax the underside of their boards to gain more speed.

Discover a shipwreck

Sometimes, during low tide, parts of the *Volo* wreck, a Norwegian barque, can be seen east of Kwaaihoek between the Dias Cross and Bushmans. On the morning of 6 March 1896, a dramatic rescue attempt was launched when the ship beached. It was carrying a heavy load of Baltic pine timber. Charles Butt, one of the founders of Kenton, rushed to the ship's aid. A certain "Kaaljan" Scheepers, a farmer from Alexandria, was also there – he rode into the waves on his horse, Tempest.

All 12 crew members were safely brought to land and the ship's anchor was salvaged. You can see it outside the town hall in Bushmans.



POOR MAN'S GAME DRIVE

Ride a horse

Explore the coastline on horseback – a 90-minute ride along the Kariega River costs R500 per person. You can also do a seven-day ride that will take you to attractions like the Dias Cross, Kasouga, Cannon Rocks and nearby game reserves. 083 281 3322 beachcomberhorsetrails.co.za

BE WATERWISE

Kenton-on-Sea currently has water restrictions due to drought and infrastructure challenges. It worsens during the holiday season. Most residents collect water in tanks – check that your rental house does the same. Ask for the contact details of a reputable water supplier beforehand.

STAY HERE

Kenton Primary School
The school grounds are used as a campsite from 15 December to 2 January. Each stand has a power point and lights, but the braai drums and picnic benches are communal.
Rate: R500 per night for four people.
046 648 1358
kentonprimaryschool@outlook.com

Woodlands Cottages and Camping
You can pitch your tent in their bush camp or stay in a cottage (some sleep two; others up to eight). It's a no-frills place full of trees where turacos and hornbills keep you company. There's a path down to the Bushmans River. The bush camp has communal facilities with space for up to six tents. The stands have no power, but there's a power point in the scullery.

Other facilities include a swimming pool, pool table, table tennis table and a spacious TV room. The Goat Shed Bush Bistro is about 2 km away on the road to Makhanda.

Rates: Camping from R180 per night (max five people per stand). Cottage accommodation from R435 per night for two people.
082 808 5976
woodlandscottages.co.za

The Oyster Collection
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066 190 3327
oystercollection.co.za



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THE VOLO


DILLY DELI

EAT HERE

dilly Deli
The breakfast buns and choc-chip cookies from this food truck, which is parked at Middle Beach, are both in a league of their own. Runners and beach strollers gather here in the morning when they need to refuel.
"dilly Deli" on Facebook

The Volo
Play padel then drink beer under a milkwood tree in the garden. There's even a beach bar in the furthest corner, where you can eat pizza with your toes in the sand. If you want something a little fancier, move over to the stylish wine bar.



The nachos here get a thumbs-up.
046 648 1251; thevolo.co.za

Pizzarella
A down-to-earth place that serves yummy pizzas, breads and waffles. It's an outdoor restaurant with one of the most scenic views of the Kariega Lagoon.
082 772 0614

MmCoffee
With names like Danny de Vito for a short Americano, Tilda Swinton for a flat white, Trevor Noah for a mochaccino and Prince Harry for a rooibos cappuccino, you'll get a good dose of Eastern Cape humour at this local fave.
064 980 2827; mmcoffee.co.za

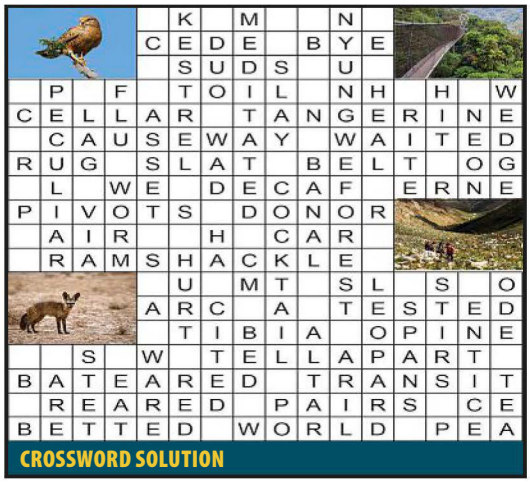
Horns Up
If you haven't had a G&T here, you haven't been on the Kariega River. This bush bar is only open in December and a few days in January. Pull in with your boat (it's about 4 km upstream) or travel by car (enter from Southwell Road).
082 772 6713

Jerry's on the Dune
This place at the Kariega Lagoon is a Kenton institution. It hosts parties at night – and some of SA's best DJs man the turntables in season – but by day the restaurant offers something for the whole family. (Jerry's is closed for renovations until Easter weekend.)
087 550 0844
jerryskenton.co.za

The Sandbar
This floating restaurant on the Bushmans River is a classic. Someone might strum a guitar in the corner, but it doesn't bother the herons hunting in the shallows. Children like to fish from the deck while their parents feast on prawns.
thesandbar.co.za

Kenton has an active tourism office at 47 Kenton Road. Their website lists houses to rent – you can find anything from a cottage under a milkwood tree to a big family home with a river view.
072 805 0651; kenton.co.za

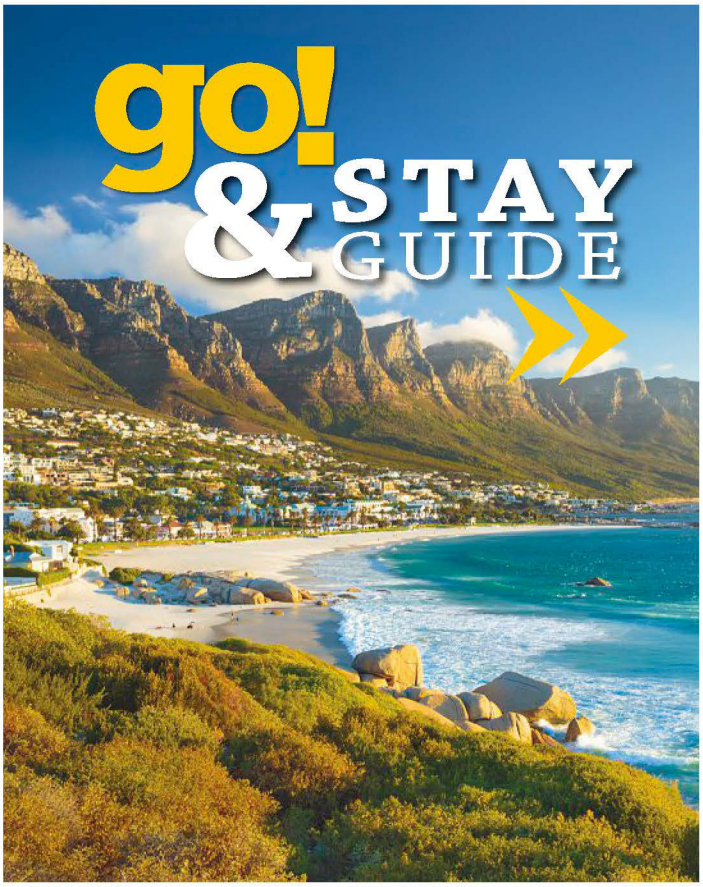
go! &BUY GUIDE

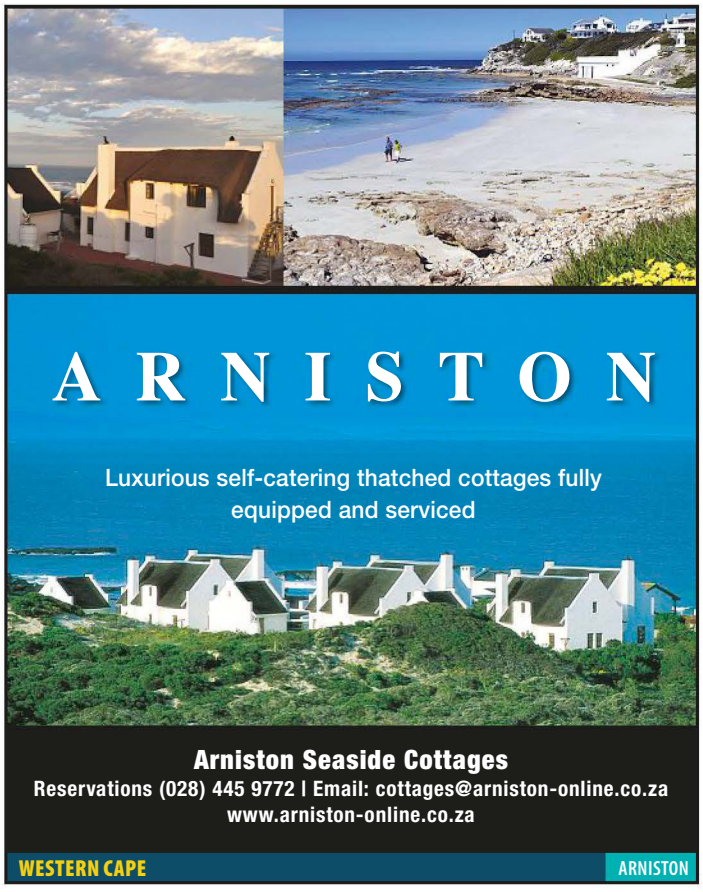


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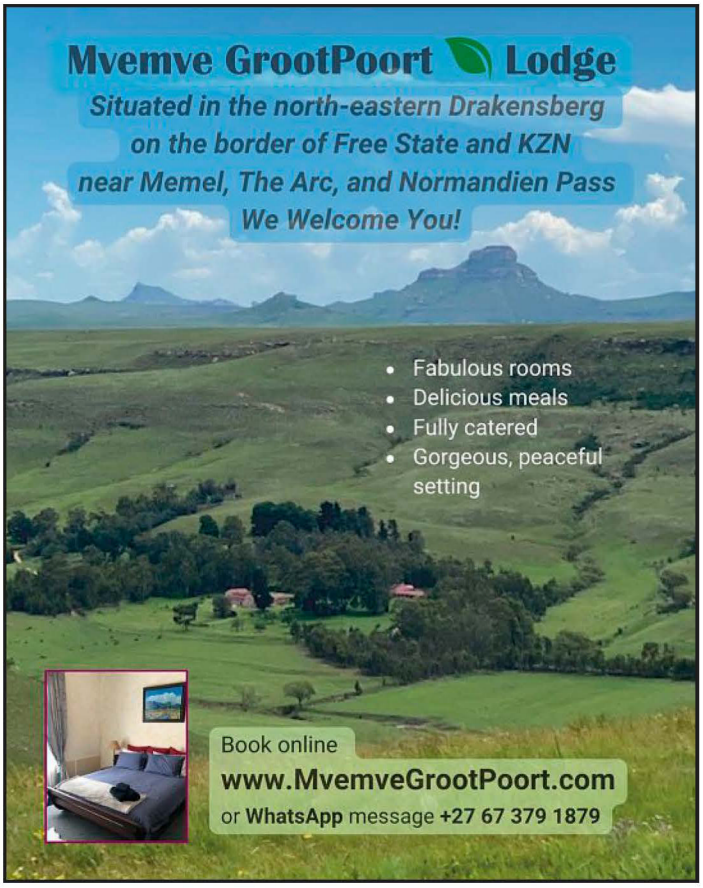
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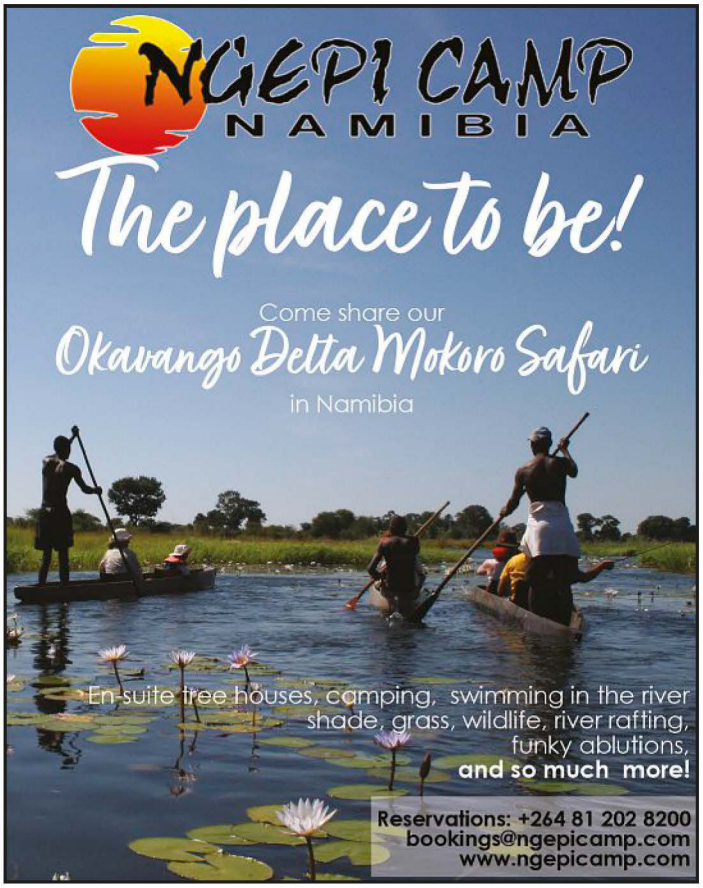
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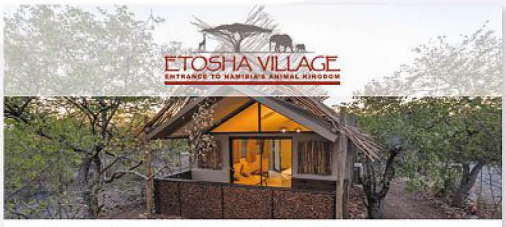




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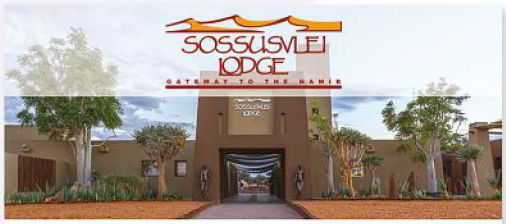
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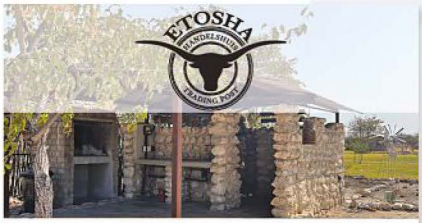
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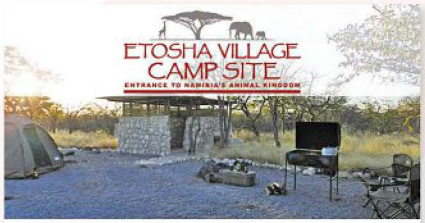
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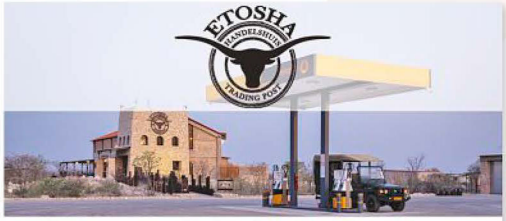
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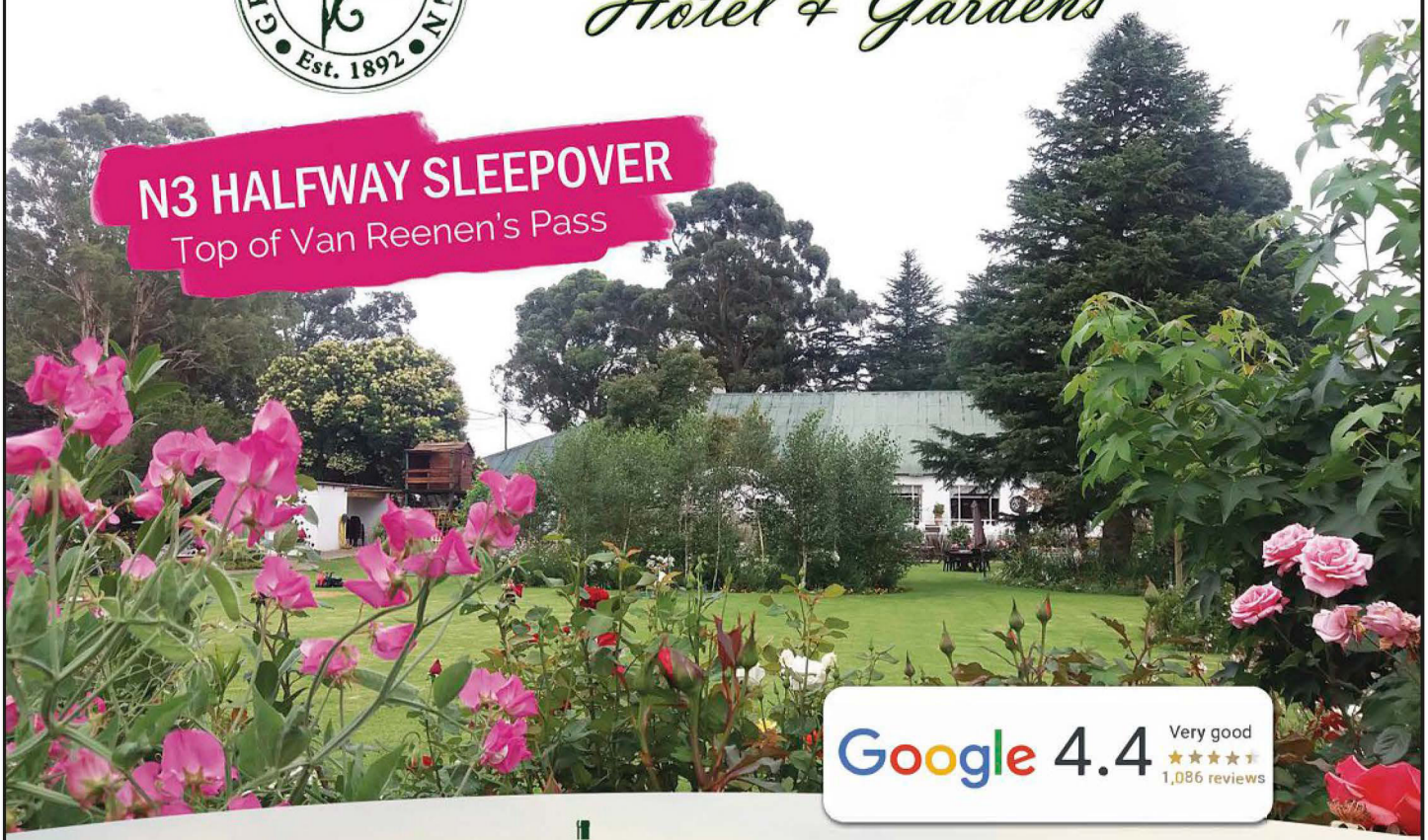
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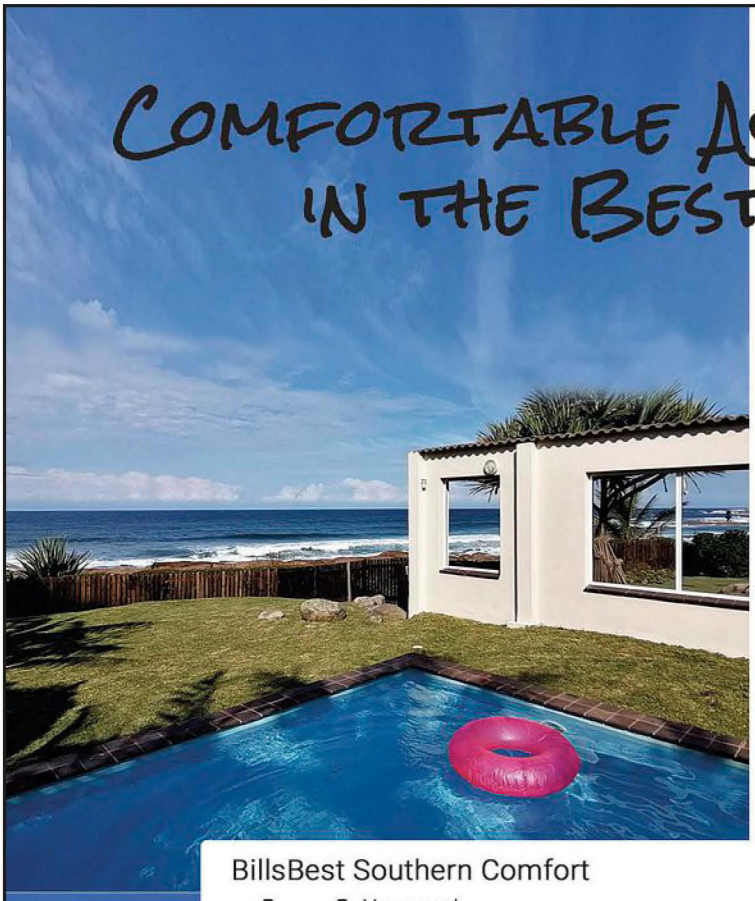
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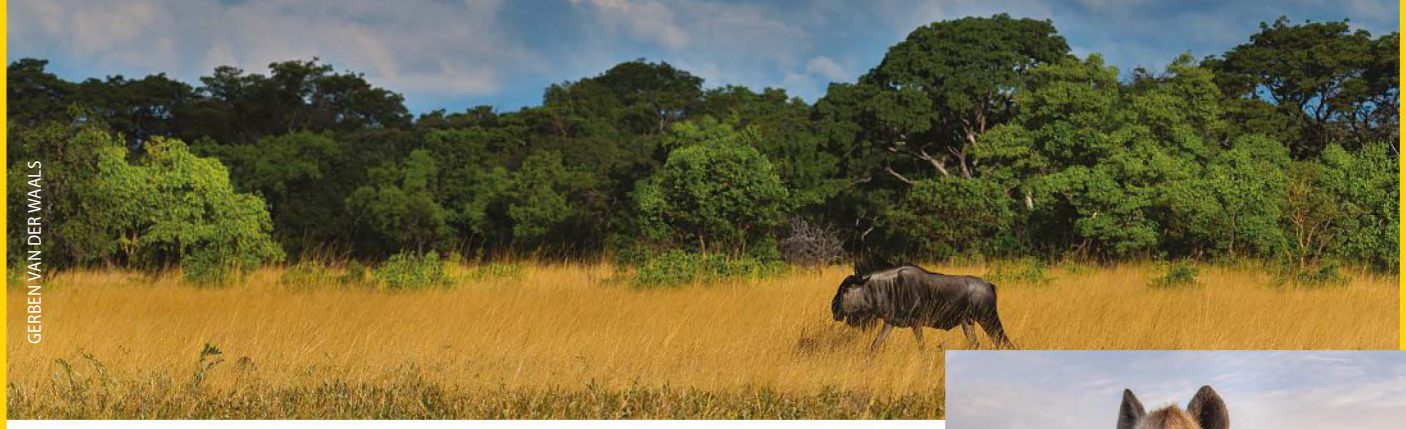

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TOURS

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GERBEN VAN DER WAALS



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AFRICAN PARKS

On this epic adventure, we will explore parts of Namibia and Zambia where few of us have ever been, including Nkasa Rupara on the Linyanti River, Mudumu and Bwabwata (Horseshoe Bend) national parks.

Zambian highlights include a visit to Sioma Ngwezi National Park, the country's third largest reserve.

We start our journey in Kongola in Namibia and will spend the next couple of days exploring the Zambezi Region, with its parks and abundant wildlife.

Then it's on to Zambia. We will enter Sioma Ngwezi National Park via a small border post. Barotseland in western Zambia is still very undeveloped and our first night in Zambia is at a rustic but beautiful campsite close to the Kwando River – the border between Zambia and Angola. This area is an undiscovered gem with elephants roaming near the river.

Over the next few days we will visit Ngonye Falls, the second highest waterfall in the Zambezi River and drive across the 50 km-wide Zambezi floodplain to Liuwa Plain National Park, in the far west of Zambia.

We'll spend four nights in the park. This pristine wilderness is best known for its huge herds of wildebeest, wild dogs and rich birdlife. We will follow the herds of migrating wildebeest and look for the predators that follow them. Before the reintroduction of lions to the park, hyenas were for years the main predators. The hyenas here are larger than in other reserves.

Birdwatchers can look forward to wattled and grey crowned cranes and black-winged pratincoles, while waterbirds like slaty egrets and whiskered terns breed here.

After Liuwa, we will travel to Mongu on our way to Katima Mulilo in Namibia, where our adventure ends with a final braai.

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The butterfly effect

The butterfly is the flashiest in the insect world. And there are more than 800 species in South Africa!

COMPILED BY **SOPHIA VAN TAAK**

WHAT DO BUTTERFLIES EAT?

This insect consumes the most when it's a caterpillar, but an adult butterfly also gets hungry! Butterflies drink the nectar of flowers, the juice of rotting fruit, and tree sap. They drink using a trunk called a proboscis, which they keep rolled up under their heads when they're not eating.



BIGGEST IN SA!

EMPEROR SWALLOWTAIL

This rainforest species is found in the coastal forests and wooded gorges of the Eastern Cape, the KZN interior, Mpumalanga and the Soutpansberg.

Wingspan: Up to 120 mm!

How do butterflies protect themselves?

The colourful wings of a butterfly make it beautiful, but also easy to see. That's why butterflies use these smart tactics to evade predators:



- Caterpillars in the *Papilionidae* family have a bright red Y-shaped "horn" on their heads – they can raise this horn when they feel threatened. It's called the osmeterium and it releases a foul smell to repel predators.
- The caterpillars of some species are black-and-white and curl up on leaves to look like bird droppings. Predators can't tell the difference!
- Some brown butterflies fly in a way that makes them look like autumn leaves blowing in the wind.
- Eyespots on the wings can mislead predators – they think the butterfly is the head of a much bigger animal that's keeping a close eye on them.
- Some caterpillars eat poisonous plants so the adult butterfly will be poisonous to predators. Poisonous insects are unpalatable – one taste and they'll never catch a butterfly again!
- Non-poisonous butterflies sometimes have the same colours as poisonous species to fool predators.



SMALLEST IN SA!

DWARF BLUE

One of the smallest butterflies in the world. Most of the blues have blue or purple wings, but some – like this one – have brown wings. The dwarf blue prefers open, sandy terrain with short grass and is found across most of the country.

Wingspan: 8 – 14 mm

KEVIN COCKBURN

What's the difference between butterflies and moths?

BUTTERFLY	MOTH
Usually colourful wings	The wings are dull in colour
Active during the day	Active during the night
Each antenna has a club-like tip	Antennae are either very thin or feathery
The fore- and hindwings move separately in flight	The fore- and hindwings are linked together to form a big wing in flight
The wings are usually held upright when the butterfly is seated	The wings are usually held flat against the body, spread out to the sides

GETTY/GALLOIMAGES.COM; ALAMY.COM











Common species

AFRICAN MONARCH

Possibly the best-known butterfly in South Africa. They're unpalatable to predators, which is why many other butterfly species mimic their appearance.

Wingspan: 50 – 70 mm

- *The female has three black spots on the hindwing and the male has four. The fourth spot (with a white centre) is a scent gland and only males have them.*
- *They secrete a scent that attracts females.*

BROWN-VEINED WHITE

You can see big migrations of this butterfly in the Free State, northern provinces and KwaZulu-Natal during December and January.

Wingspan: 40 mm

- *White or cream-coloured wings with a thin black edge.*
- *The wings have oblong white patterns with black borders near the body of the butterfly. The patterns become rounded closer to the edge of the wing. The female doesn't have clearly defined patterns and she has a wider black band along the edge of her wings.*

MEADOW WHITE

This butterfly is usually seen in big groups, especially in farm fields or open grassland.

Wingspan: 35 – 40 mm

- *White wings with a black spot and white dots on the tip of the forewing.*
- *The female has similar brown spots on the underwing. The male has a white underwing.*
- *The brown spots on the underwing look powdery, with yellow dots in-between.*

PAINTED LADY

This beautiful butterfly occurs in all habitats and likes gardens.

Wingspan: 40 – 50 mm

- *Orange wings with a big black tip with white spots on the forewing.*
- *Three rows of black spots run parallel to the outer edge of the underwing.*

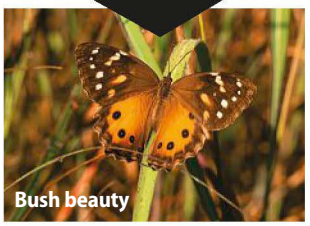
CITRUS SWALLOWTAIL

This butterfly is particularly abundant in December. The big green-and-brown caterpillars are considered a pest by citrus farmers – they strip young trees of their leaves.

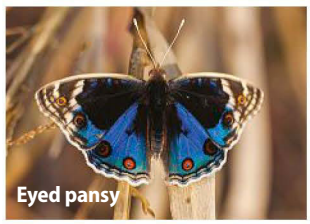
Wingspan: 80 – 90 mm

- *Black wings with a solid yellow band over the hindwing.*
- *The forewing has a yellow band of irregular spots.*
- *Large blue, black and orange eyespots on the hindwings.*

LOOK AT THESE BEAUTIES


Bush beauty


Blue-spotted emperor


Eyed pansy


Large silver-spotted copper


Large striped swordtail


Smoky orange tip


Green-banded swallowtail

Sources: Ivor Migdoll's *Field Guide to the Butterflies of Southern Africa; SASOL First Field Guide to Butterflies and Moths of Southern Africa; Butterflies of South Africa's National Botanical Gardens;* lepsocafrica.org; sanparks.org



BIRDS

BY FAANSIE PEACOCK

WAIT YOUR TERN



Albert Mclean took this photo of a Saunders's tern in the same place, but on a different occasion.

ALBERT MCLEAN

Two little eyes stare at me from between the soap dish and the tap. My brain freezes for a moment and I stand there with my toothbrush in my mouth and toothpaste dribbling down my chin. What in the world? It's a red-legged kassina – a lifer for me. I know it's a frog, but still… I take it as a good sign for the day ahead.

We're on the San Sebastian Peninsula in Mozambique, a finger of land that juts into the Indian Ocean south of Vilankulo, and we're looking for the very special Saunders's tern. These cute birds were first recorded in southern Africa as recently as 2019 and their movements remain a mystery: After they've nested along the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa, they seemingly disappear off the face of the earth.

But finding these tiny terns in a 350 km^2 lagoon filled with sandbars, channels and islands is easier said than done…

We slip and slide down a dune and wade through the mangroves to the boat. Crab plovers watch us sleepily, terek sandpipers screech when we disturb them, and olive bee-eaters bake in the morning sun.

Everything is loaded in the boat and we're slathered with sunscreen. We make our way into the blue. It's hard to see where the lagoon ends and the sky begins. We're in the experienced hands of a local skipper. He glides through a network of channels that changes after every storm. How does he know where we are? Finally, he switches off the engine, coasts a while and lightly bumps the boat against the sand.

What now? The idea is to look for the terns when they come to rest on the sandbars during high tide. But there are no exposed sandbars in sight, not to mention a tern. We wait patiently. After 10 minutes, small waves begin to ripple in the shallows. After 20 minutes, a narrow strip of sand emerges. After half an hour, we're on an island with an abundance of seabirds.

We're having so much fun looking at birds, we don't notice the hours flying by. The skipper has to give a loud whistle to gain our attention. I'm taken aback when I look around: It's as if we're in the middle of a desert now, with open sand as far as the eye can see. We haven't seen a Saunders's tern yet, but the skipper says it's time to go. The boat is still afloat in a narrow gully, but if we stay here much longer we'll be stranded.

The water isn't deep enough to head home, but we have to move to a new location, and the skipper has a plan. After half an hour of criss-crossing the channels, I spot our destination: a windblown awning on stilts in the water. It offers a little shade and it's a welcome relief from the Mozambican sun. We pull out a cooler box full of Sparletta Morango, 2M beers and fresh mangoes.

As I scrape the last bit of fruit off the pit with my teeth, I see a movement in the water. Clearly we're not the only ones enjoying the shade… The water writhes with fish under the structure. Nik, one of the other tour members, decides to take a nap, but I put on my diving mask. I've snorkelled over tropical reefs around the world, but this spot beats them all. I think there are more fish than water in the 3x3-metre block of shade.

I drift slowly into the chaos and soon I'm inside a school so dense I constantly feel fins and scales against my skin. The only problem is that the tide is turning and the current is growing stronger – it's threatening to sweep me away if I lose my grip on the pole. But holding on is its own challenge because venomous lionfish hover nearby. Every time I want to move my hand I have

to wave them off. They glare at me and raise their red-and-white fins.

Then I remember something: Linda, who is also on the tour, lent me her underwater camera! It's in the pocket of my board shorts. I reach for it, but the camera is gone. *Merda*. I search the seafloor from corner to corner – I even move a big fish from its sandy nest to see if it's maybe lying on top of the camera. Eventually I give up and confess to Linda that I lost it. But then Nik comes walking along the beach with the camera in hand! Apparently it floats and it washed onto the sand downstream. Phew.

A few hours later, at high tide, we're back in the boat and looking for terns again. I see a scattering of table tennis balls on a narrow sandbar. Strange. They must have fallen off a ship. But when I pick one up, it hits me: They're sea turtle eggs! I bury the lot and hope for the best.

In the distance, white wings flicker above the waves. We head there, but first stop to meet the skipper's cousin, who has a dhow full of silver fish. One of the young men on board loses his footing, falls into the water and gets entangled in the net. His colleagues curl over with laughter. We swap mangoes and sunscreen for a few fish and continue on.

A grey back breaks the surface and our skipper cuts the engine so we can watch a pod of humpback dolphins. In the shallows, we see colourful stingrays. The tern sandbar is only a stone's throw away and we drop anchor. The channel is deeper than it looks and we struggle through with our telescopes and cameras. As we splash around, an inflated pufferfish floats by – Nik's yelp when he stepped on a sharp shell must have given it a fright. We set up our scopes in the sea. Have you ever peered through a spotting scope with water up to your chest? At least it's nice and cool.

There are terns galore. We study them closely: How far past the eye does the eyebrow go? How big is the black tip on the yellow bill? Is there a contrast between the tips of the feathers? And we count: 261 lesser crested terns, 8 swift terns, about 600 common terns, 3 roseate terns, 423 little terns, 2 sandwich terns. Even a lost Damara tern. More terns than we can count, but not one Saunders's.

Some people might find this whole birding thing a waste of time, but I'll never forget that day we spent in Mozambique, in the ever-changing space between ocean and sky. Even if it means I have to try again for that mysterious tern…

BIRD BRAIN



DYLAN VASAPOLLI

ANSWER #4

Despite its minimalist colour scheme, this little cutie pie is a handsome beast, with that slash of white across the wing, white accent below the eye and fetching black mask.

Take a close look at its bill: There are two good clues hidden here. Firstly, the bill is relatively flat and featureless, but it has a tiny hook at the end, which suggests a diet of insects. This is supported by the array of little bristles around the bill.

Does that colour pattern look familiar? Perhaps one of the batises? An excellent guess, but batises have yellow (not black) eyes and patterned chests.

Something a lot of birders underestimate is the importance of shape: Whereas a batis is a fat little thing with a short tail and oversized head, our bird is sleekly proportioned with a long tail. So, what is it then? Maybe a helmet-shrike or puffback? Nope, the bill is not intimidating enough. One of the tits? No, none of those have white eyebrows.

This hyperactive firecracker is a fairy flycatcher – and surely one of the most delightful little birds you'll ever cross paths with.

Ornithologically speaking, *Stenostira scita* is a rather special bird. So unique, in fact, that a whole new bird family was created for it (*Stenostiridae*) – a family it shares with half a dozen other oddities from Africa and Asia.

"Fairies" nest in Namaqualand and Lesotho in the summer months and then migrate to the Bushveld in winter. If you live in Gauteng, watch the trees in your garden for a flash of white and grey during the frosty months.

Firefinch
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Few people are as passionate about birds as Faansie Peacock is. His Firefinch app includes calls, illustrations and photos of all the birds in southern Africa. It's incredibly intuitive and fun to use. Faansie also posts new articles every week. Search the Apple App Store or on Google Play.



AFRICA BY BIKE
Part 4

TRAVEL JOURNAL

On high alert in West Africa

In 2023, **Jean Cooper** and **De Witt Oosthuizen** rode their motorcycles from Pretoria to Madrid. In this instalment, they're deep in West Africa, slogging their way through Benin, Togo, Ghana, the Ivory Coast and Guinea.

WORDS **JEAN COOPER** PICTURES **JEAN COOPER & DE WITT OOSTHUIZEN**



The travellers took a break on the pass between Sebetere and Tiankoi, Guinea. They used Husqvarna Norden 901 Adventure bikes.

Opposite page, from the top: John runs an efficient motorcycle workshop in the main street of Lomé, Togo – with a smile. These policemen escorted Jean and De Witt through Ghana. Accra's modern city centre.

A storm broke out just as we were about to leave Cotonou, a harbour city in Benin. It was late in October 2023 and day 45 of our adventure. We chatted with a woman called Yasmina, who ran the local motorcycle club, as we waited for the rain to abate.

Yasmina told us about how Benin and Togo were supposed to be one country, but they were split during the colonial era. In some places the border goes right through people's houses! She told us about a guy who uses his house as a border post: You walk in from Togo at the back door, pay your border fees, and walk out the front door into Benin.

When we departed, Yasmina and two other riders from the club took us to a 30 m-high bronze statue celebrating the so-called Dahomey Amazons, an all-female military regiment that existed here from the 17th century until the late 19th century.

From there, De Witt and I rode west to Lomé (160 km), the capital of Togo.

After the rain, everything smelt fresh and the streets were clean. Even the border crossing was a refreshing experience. We walked into a well-maintained building and handed over our passports to the Benin officer who stamped us out. He handed the passports to the Togolese officer next to him, who gave us forms to fill in, and then stamped us in. Two border posts in one!

Our good luck continued. Apparently, there was a motorbike workshop in the main street in Lomé. Imagine if we could get the bikes serviced, too? We searched and found the place. A man called John welcomed us, wearing a yellow T-shirt and a quiet smile. Yes, he could change the oil. Yes, he could do it today. We were in the hands of one of those capable, down-to-earth people who hold the world together.

The next morning, it was only 500 m from our hotel to the border with Ghana. Outside the border building, money changers and self-proclaimed "border helpers" swarmed the bikes. "Sir, I can see you're a good person, please let me help you through the border!"

We'd been through enough border crossings by then to know that eye contact alone is enough, from the helper's perspective, to establish a binding contract.

Our passports were stamped and we mounted up. Two ropes were stretched across the road to prevent us from crossing into Ghana. They lowered the first one and we rode slowly to the next one. The rope stayed taut. The man in charge quickly jumped up, peered through a window behind him and shouted something. We knew what this meant: Someone inside wanted money…

The princes of Accra

Just then, three neatly uniformed Ghanaian policemen approached. "Are you Dr Cooper and Dr Oosthuizen?" Yes, we said. The rope was lowered.

A few weeks before, we'd been invited by Ghana's deputy minister of education to talk about our journey and experiences at the Achimota high school in the capital, Accra. He'd arranged a police escort from the border for us! So, for the next four hours, we rode to Accra (about 200 km from the border) escorted by armed officers. Cars and trucks gave way on both sides, the blue and red lights flashed, and we rode into the city like princes.

We stayed with friends in Accra for the next three days. On the first morning, a black Land Cruiser with tinted windows pulled up to the gate to pick us up. We'd been invited for breakfast with the deputy minister of education and the morning traffic parted like the Red Sea.

After breakfast, they took us to the high school to give our talk. The school was something to behold: The grounds were sprawled over fields with ancient trees and colonial-era buildings, all impeccably maintained.

The school hall was packed with at least 500 children. The building had been designed to suit the tropical climate: No walls, just a roof on columns, a floor and a stage.

Each of us took a turn to talk about our experiences so far on our journey, as well as our careers. Then the children asked questions, mostly about their own career choices. De Witt and I did our best to offer something of value to these bright-eyed kids. There were even journalists in the audience and afterwards we did media interviews.

On the way back, I thought of some lines of the school anthem: "She's the school of whom we boast, she's the glory of the coast – Achimota!" A school greater than the individuals passing through it, on a continent greater than each one of us.

On Day 49, we followed the main tarred highway west to the city of Cape Coast. We were still travelling under police escort and our hotel costs for the night would also be covered. It's amazing how quickly one gets used to special treatment!

Around noon, we arrived at the hotel, unpacked, and were taken by the police to Elmina Castle nearby. It's a horrifying structure – a stone hell where women were kept before being sold as slaves. The governor would choose a slave to accompany him to his quarters. If she refused, she'd be left without food and water until she died.

We rode back to the hotel along the coast. To our right, wooden buildings housing eating and drinking establishments faced the water. Palm trees, a long beach. To our left there were thatched huts and clucking chickens. Women bent down to do laundry and tend cooking fires with babies on their backs. The men were probably out fishing for the day's meal.

The next day we were escorted to the border with the Ivory Coast – our plan was to reach the town of Aboisso (274 km) before dark. It was mind-numbing to ride in convoy because we had to stay close together.

The school was something to behold: The grounds were sprawled over fields with ancient trees and colonial-era buildings, all impeccably maintained.

I couldn't look left or right because every now and then, the police truck – just metres in front of me – would stop to creep through a pothole or over a speed bump.

After about five hours of riding, we arrived at the border post, where we bid farewell to the officers. The two border posts were slow-going and took us four hours. The sun would set soon and we still had 60 km to go to Aboisso.

We left the border exhausted and starving. We started picking up speed because the road was good. Then suddenly, a policeman stepped into the road. He told us that the officials at the border post had called him. We had to go back because we'd missed the police desk and they hadn't captured our import permits for the bikes.

Protesting didn't help. We turned around, went back to the border and jumped through the necessary hoops. Then we hit the road again – 60 km of smooth tar through the forest twilight. Here and there, fresh rain on the road…

We stumbled into the little hotel like two dehydrated soldiers. The receptionists didn't understand English, but they immediately grasped our need for cold beer.

Doubt in the Ivory Coast

The route for Day 51 stretched from the harbour city of Abidjan to the capital of Yamoussoukro (347 km). The tar to Abidjan was beautiful and then it got even better: a highway all the way to Yamoussoukro. But when we stopped for petrol and I checked my phone, I saw the news: There was trouble in Guinea, the next country on our itinerary. A former dictator and some of his cronies (in custody for their participation in a massacre in 2009) had escaped in the early hours and the country's borders were closed.

What now? About a week earlier, we'd done some research on Mali as a potential route to avoid the bad Guinean roads, but what we found out about the unrest and abductions in Mali made those roads seem like child's play.

We stopped at the Basilica in Yamoussoukro – a massive Roman Catholic church with space for 18 000 worshippers. It reportedly cost nearly US$600 million to build in the 1980s. I wondered, maybe facetiously, what those millions could have achieved if they'd been spent on schools and hospitals instead. In fact, right across from the Basilica stood the empty shell of a hospital.

We woke up feeling like rudderless rowboats drifting downstream. Should we head west and hope that the Guinea border was open? Or go north to Bouaké where there was a Malian consulate where we could enquire about visas? Or south back to Abidjan to take a boat to Dakar in Senegal, skirting Guinea? Or should we just stay put and wait for more news?

We headed north. The tar road to Bouaké (110 km) was so new that it didn't appear on my GPS. What







Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Fishing boats bob in the harbour next to Elmina Castle in Cape Coast, Ghana. A street scene in Cape Coast, en route to Elmina Castle. De Witt looks around the impressive Basilique Notre Dame de la Paix (Basilica of Our Lady of Peace) in Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast, the largest Christian church in the world. While in Ghana, Jean and De Witt were invited to address the senior pupils at Achimota high school in Accra.

a wonderful gift from a government to its people to build and maintain good roads!

Bouaké was larger and busier than expected. We pulled over by a park to study our maps. We couldn't find the Malian consulate. De Witt asked the man who was sharing our park bench. Yes, he knew about it – his dad worked there!

The consul-general of the Republic of Mali looked at our documents, interested in our trans-Africa story. He said the visa shouldn't be a problem. Then he looked straight at us across his desk. "You shouldn't ride through Mali," he said. "There's a war. It's dangerous for people like you."

We found a place to stay called Hôtel mon Afrik à Bouaké outside town. It was an oasis under massive trees. We booked in at reception to the tune of Norah Jones in the background. We started making calls: Are there boats that depart for Dakar from Abidjan? Any news about Guinea's borders? We heard about a motorcyclist in Mali who promised he could safely guide us through. There were many options on the table.

Then my wife Fransie called from Pretoria. She'd heard back from both the South African embassies in the Ivory Coast and Guinea: The borders were open!

It was great news but we were still worn out by the uncertainty. Things change so fast in Africa. What if the border was actually closed when we got there? What if the border was open, but they wouldn't accept our e-visas because the expiration date had passed?

Some background: Getting visas is one of the impossibilities of planning a trip like ours. Before you depart South Africa, you need to get about 15 of them, in series. In Accra, we visited the Guinean embassy to explain that we wouldn't reach the border by the date on the e-visa. The woman behind the counter assured us it wouldn't be a problem…

Day 53. The tar road to the town of Man (370 km) was a satin ribbon weaving between hills and over plains. Orchards of date palms lined the road. In the wetlands, there were small islands with thatched huts used by people to fish. We reminded each other to enjoy the moment. The antidote to "What if?" is appreciating the here and now.

We camped at a church campsite on the edge of Man. Turtle doves reminded us of Pretoria. A giant scorpion and a little gecko circled each other on the ground. Then the gecko dashed away, probably because of the bullfrog that showed up beside us in the grass.

The elephants in the Ivory Coast have apparently been almost entirely wiped out. The international hunger for ivory was just too great. But here, where we sat and drank our daily post-ride beer, life abounded.

Suddenly we slammed into a bump that was invisible in the dusk. De Witt flew over it in a red cloud of dust. I followed right behind him.

It was 207 km to Nzérékoré, our next destination. Just before the border, we met an Austrian on a motorcycle who was heading south, to Cape Town. He said the border crossing was easy.

We breezed through the Ivory Coast side and rode up to the small building next to the Guinean flag, where we showed all our papers again. Two stern men in uniform scrutinised everything. We held our breath. Then, the news we'd been dreading: "Sorry, your visas have expired."

"But the woman in Accra…"

"Sorry, look here, look at the date, it's expired."

"We know… But the woman at the Guinea embassy in Accra…"

"Sorry, you'll have to go back to Abidjan and get new visas."

They called the boss. He walked closer, looked at the visas. "Yes, very sorry, you'll have to go back to Abidjan."

We explained again and this time he listened. Right, he said, he'd call Conakry (the capital) and find out. We waited and decided to sit there all day, even set up the tent, until they let us through.

Then the message came: We could go!

The last chicken in Guinea

We woke up to a blanket of clouds that kept the earth cool, promising rain. We packed, drank coffee, ate eggs and sourdough bread. We wanted to cover 450 km to the town of Faranah for the day.

The road, which people had warned us about in Nigeria already, was paved and wound through a forest that folded its fingers around us. There were potholes here and there, and every now and then a speed bump, but it was hardly challenging. Even the police played along, smiling at every roadblock and letting us pass without stopping. It rained later to cool us down, and just before we got cold, it stopped. The wind dried our clothes as we rode.

Inevitably, however, the bad stretch arrived. The tar deteriorated into gravel and progress was slow, but after 20 km it became tar again. We were hungry, our bodies were sore, and once again we'd neglected to drink enough water. De Witt said over the helmet intercom that he didn't want to eat fish for dinner. If there was a choice, he wanted chicken. I agreed. Fish bones are too challenging when you're really hungry.

The last stretch of dirt road to the hotel was beautiful and we flew along. Suddenly we slammed into a bump that was invisible in the dusk. De Witt flew over it in a red cloud of dust. I followed right behind him. People along the road yelled – had something fallen off? I felt behind me. Everything was still there.

An hour later, when we dismounted, De Witt realised his bag with his passport, money and documents was gone. He jumped on his bike and rode back to search. Near the bump, someone waved to him. The man had sat and waited, knowing the stranger would come back for his bag.

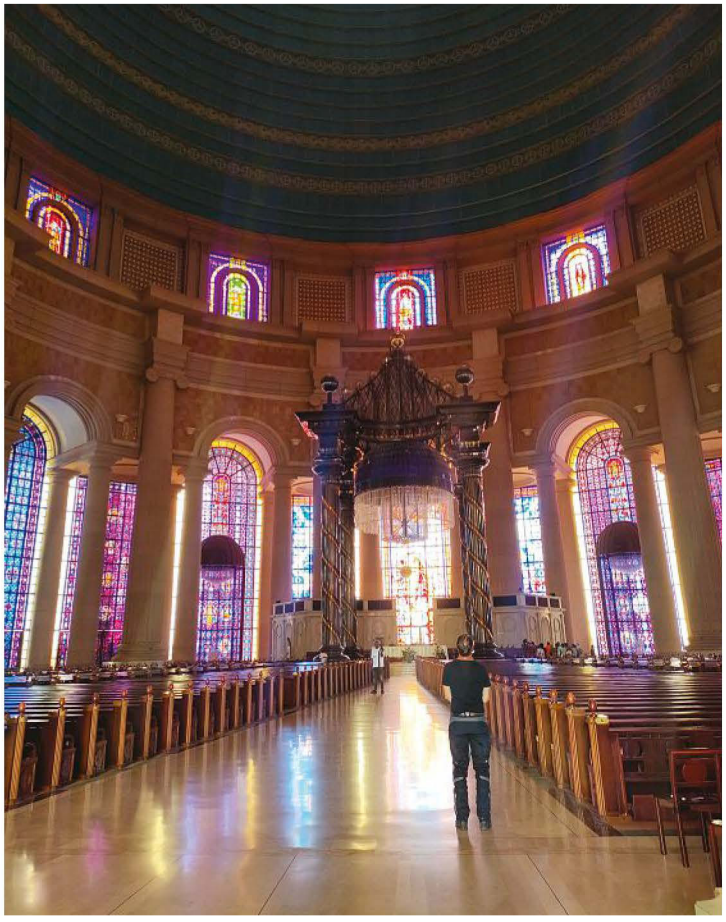
Back at the hotel, De Witt went to the dining room while I called my son in South Africa. Eventually I went to find him. The kitchen only had one plate of fish and











Top: While they waited for news about Guinea's border posts, the guys were joined by this tortoise at the Hôtel mon Afrik in Bouaké, Ivory Coast.
Bottom: A warm Coke is better than no Coke reckons De Witt on their way to Faranah, Guinea.

Opposite page: Jean and De Witt took shelter from the 41 °C heat under the awning of a garage in Mamou, Guinea.

one plate of chicken left; they'd brought both to the table while I was outside on the phone. De Witt had left the chicken for me.

Day 56, and the 294 km stretch from Faranah to Pita was no joke. It was the middle of the day but pitch dark from the red dust. I could vaguely make out the lights of oncoming trucks but the dust was so thick I could hardly see De Witt's taillight, even when I was right up against him. If we hit a hole or a ditch, it would be over. Stopping was impossible because taxis and trucks were following just as blindly from behind. Thankfully, a surviving piece of paved road appeared and the dust settled, but it was just as hard to navigate, with a crumbling surface full of giant potholes.

Suddenly, a stationary truck. An oncoming taxi and I both swerved to avoid it and hit potholes, hoping our wheels survived. The truck was parked with its engine next to it in the road. Three young men were next to and under the vehicle; worn out – they'd probably been working for days to get it running again. It was the umpteenth broken vehicle we'd seen that day. Blown-out tyres. Broken axles. Engines giving up. There was nothing romantic about this place, except maybe for the jungle, which lay draped over the mountains. Next to the road were poor, grass-hut communities living off the land, but they still needed the basics: clothes, shoes, medicine or a new cellphone battery. In the towns, people lived close together in makeshift shelters of blue plastic tarpaulin and zinc sheets.

We bought petrol, Coke, bottled water, Red Bull and Pringles that had been delivered here by those very trucks.

The next day we headed north-west to Koundara (287 km), about 45 km from the border with Senegal. It was a day of contrasts. The road started off as a painful crumbling path and transformed into perfect Chinese asphalt. Later, just as abruptly, it reverted back to a shake-you-to-pieces endurance test, right where a mountain pass began – a rock-hard mud road that had dried up. Somewhere along the way, my CamelBak was shaken off – gone! My helmet intercom also stopped working and we couldn't communicate while riding. We switched to hand signals, as in the old days.

Later, we spotted two motorbikes up ahead and stopped to say hello. They were two riders from Germany, a man and a woman, both deep in their seventies. They were heading towards Cape Town. We also encountered a cyclist – another German and also headed to Cape Town. Each of us on our own journey.

We were tired. We'd spent eight hours in the saddle and ten hours the day before. How many days had we ridden without rest? Our visas only allowed us five days to cross Guinea, so our rest day had to wait until we were in Senegal.

Something else also awaited there: the Sahara Desert…

This article is an edited version of Jean's blog posts as published on expedition-h2o.org. Read Part 1 (South Africa, Namibia, Angola, DRC) in issue #196, Part 2 (Republic of the Congo, Cameroon) in issue #197 and Part 3 (Nigeria and Benin) in issue #198.





STAY THE COURSE

Jean and De Witt used several navigation resources to make sure they were on track. Here is a summary of what worked well for them.

- **Husqvarna navigation system:** According to Jean, the built-in nav system on their motorcycles was not adequate for travel in Africa. De Witt's wouldn't even turn on.
- **Garmin Zumo XT:** This GPS was on Jean's motorcycle and was so-so – it sent them in the wrong direction a few times. "Garmin maps for that region are insufficient," says Jean.
- **Google Maps:** This well-known app was on both their phones and worked reasonably well.
- **Maps.me:** De Witt had this app on his cellphone and it worked great. Bonus: It also worked offline.
- **iOverlander:** They used this app to find places to stay on their route. The information and rates are up to date and updated by fellow travellers.

WHERE WE STAYED

The rates listed here are from 2023 – use them as a rough guide only.

Day 45 Lomé, Seaside Hotel (R607 per person)

Days 46 – 48 Accra, with friends

Day 49 Cape Coast, Ridge Royal Hotel (sponsored by the Ghanaian government)

Day 50 Aboisso, Hotel Rocher (R866 per person)

Day 51 Yamoussoukro, Onyx Hotel (R1 508 per person)

Day 52 Bouaké, Hôtel mon Afrik à Bouaké (R1 352 per person)

Day 53 Man, Centre Diocesain Béthanie (R300 per person)

Day 54 Nzérékoré, Hôtel Résidence Bethanie (R919 per person)

Day 55 Faranah, Hôtel de Niger (R534 per person)

Day 56 Pita, Hôtel Chez Sister (R709 per person)

Day 57 Koundara, Hôtel de Ville (R215 per person)

VISAS

Benin South Africans don't need a visa

Togo R760 each, bought as an e-visa beforehand on voyage.gouv.tg

Ghana R2 050 each, you apply at their embassy in Pretoria

Ivory Coast R1 200 each, at their embassy in Pretoria

Guinea R2 400 each, e-visa at paf.gov.gn/visa









MEET THE ADVENTURERS

Jean Cooper and De Witt Oosthuizen have known each other since their student days at the University of Pretoria in the late 1990s. Jean works as a management consultant for various organisations. He and his wife Fransie live in Pretoria and they have three children – Riëtte (15), Rose (17) and Francois (19).

De Witt has lived in Australia since 2005, where he works in Wangaratta, Victoria, as the clinical director of emergency services at Northeast Health Wangaratta Hospital. He and his partner Lindsay have eight-year-old twins, Maggie and Jack.

Jean and De Witt named their Africa trip "Expedition H2O" – they raised funds to buy and install rainwater tanks in Ezenzeleni near Warden in the Free State, a project supported by the Direct Transact Foundation (directtransact.co.za).

To date, they've raised enough money to install 17 tanks that will give 820 people access to clean drinking water. Visit expedition-h2o.org for more information. Contact Jean directly (jean@tiltinternational.com) if you want to donate.



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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 nine-lesson course, you will learn how to shoot the moon, the Milky Way and stars, and master the techniques for capturing stunning nighttime shots.

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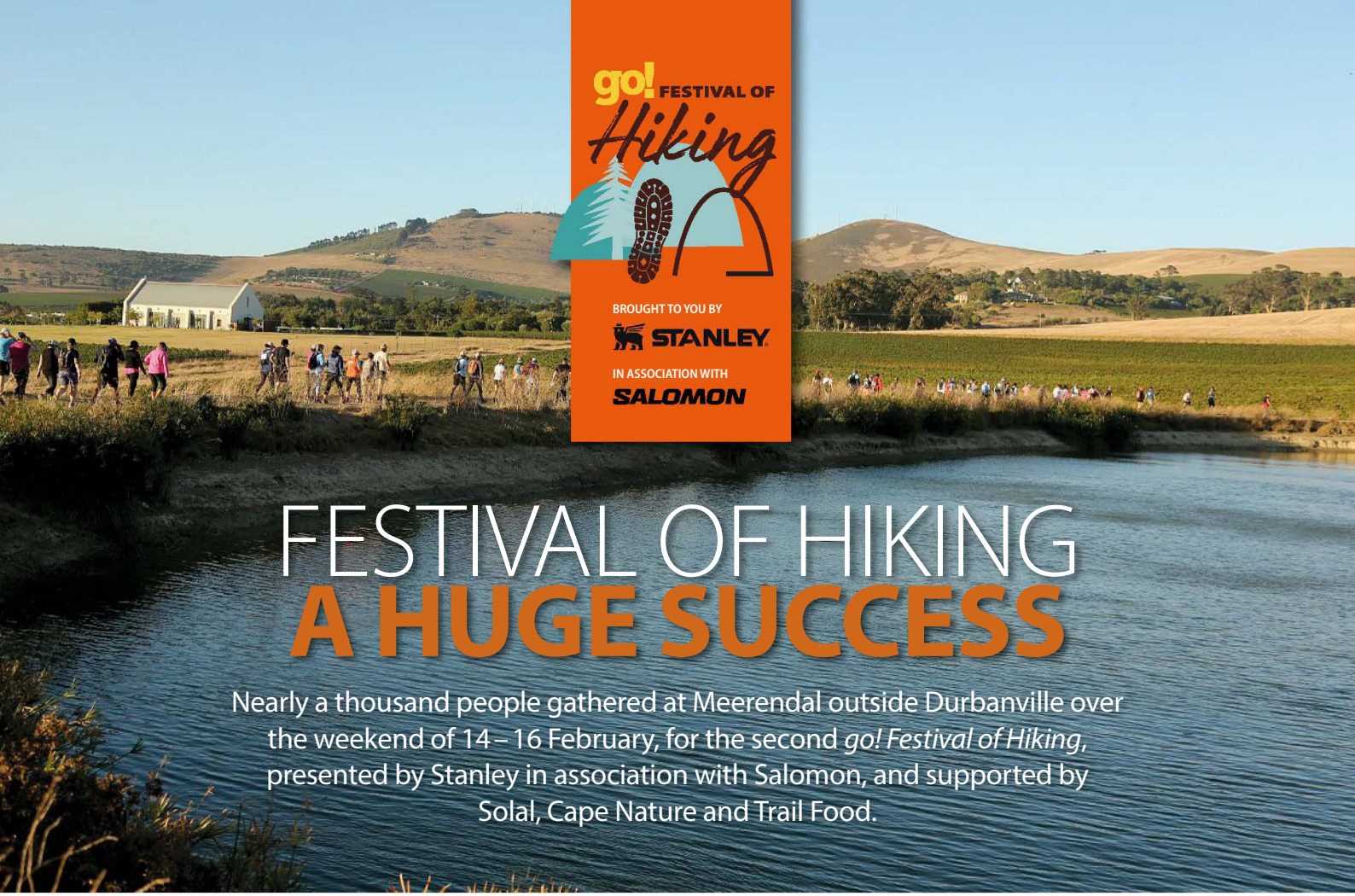
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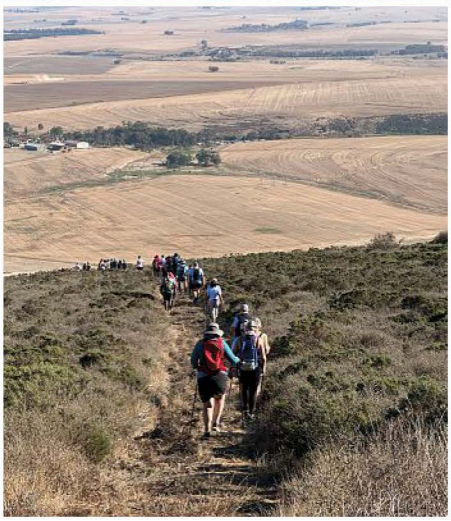
takebetterphotos.gomag.co.za/course/night-photography



FESTIVAL OF HIKING
A HUGE SUCCESS

Nearly a thousand people gathered at Meerendal outside Durbanville over the weekend of 14 – 16 February, for the second *go! Festival of Hiking*, presented by Stanley in association with Salomon, and supported by Solal, Cape Nature and Trail Food.





Fierce winds and February heat couldn't deter walkers from taking part in the second *go! Festival of Hiking*, once again held at the prestigious Meerendal Wine Estate.

Participants came from near and far to enjoy the weekend. On Friday afternoon, walkers stretched their legs with a relaxed 6 km route at Meerendal. Saturday was the main event, with hundreds tackling one of three distances: 6 km, 13 km or 25 km. Those on the 13 km and 25 km routes faced the challenging Dorstberg climb.

Early Sunday morning, walkers set off on the final stretch, a leisurely 10 km meander through Meerendal.

Before and after the events, people relaxed on the lawns, hoping to win one of the fantastic lucky draw prizes from sponsors. Others soothed their tired legs with massages, courtesy of Solal, in the registration tent. Salomon showcased their latest hiking gear and gave participants the chance to test the Salomon DRX Defy Gravel shoes, specifically designed for gravel roads, on a shorter route.

The most popular distance this year was the 13 km, with walkers aged 7 to 78. At least two walkers over 75 completed all three days, including the gruelling 25 km on Saturday! The youngest participant was Isabelle Wessels (7), who completed Friday's 6 km route, happily skipping alongside her parents, Yolande and JP Wessels from Durbanville.

This event continues to grow each year, thanks to the support of our sponsors and loyal readers. We look forward to seeing even more walkers at the starting line next year!

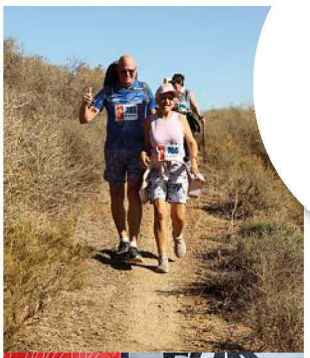


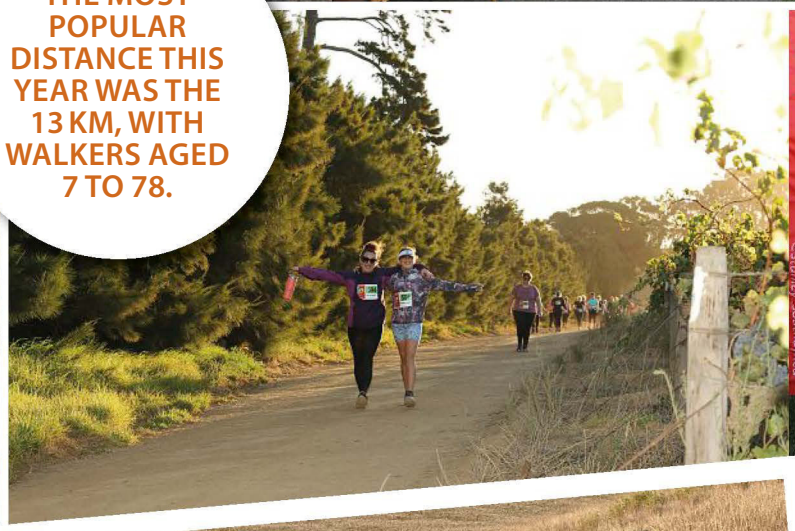






THE MOST POPULAR DISTANCE THIS YEAR WAS THE 13 KM, WITH WALKERS AGED 7 TO 78.



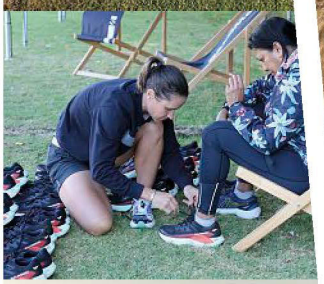


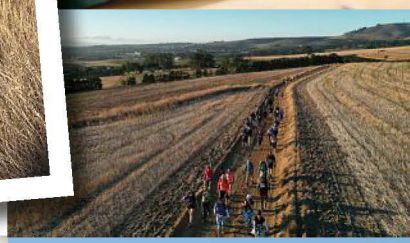


















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CROSSWORD PUZZLE

BY GERDA ENGELBRECHT

SOLUTION ON **PAGE 104**



Bird (greater . . .) | Pair of singers | Reflected | "See you later!" | National park in Rwanda (7,6)

Destroy

Surrender | Soapy water | Cure



Odd / Wine storage | Common illness / Trail | Drudgery / Boon | Nihonium (symbol) | Bestseller / Custom | Golf club / Odour-less gas

Naartjie / Bundle

Raised road | Held back / Trite

Thin strip of wood / Maggot | Sash / Mojito or mimosa | Oganes-son (symbol)

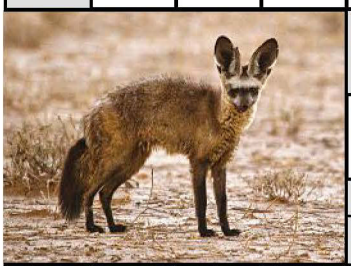
Floor covering | You and I / TV channel | Coffee choice (short) | Sea eagle (literary)

Giver / Hectare (abbr)



Swivels | Up in the . . . (uncertain) | Injured | Centi-metre (abbr) | Vehicle

Rundown | Hiking trail in the Baviaans



. . . de Triomphe | Mount (abbr) / Quoted | Sine loco (abbr) | Mixes / Extends over | Classical poem / Allure

Bottom of a river | Tried / Church platform

Shinbone / Merchan-dise | Judge / Seed cover

. . . fox (3-5) | 100 square metres | Retain (print) / Consume | Spot the difference / Scarlet | Warm drink

Passage / Polonium (symbol)

Brought up / Wagered | Sets of two | Cerium (symbol)

Earth | Veggie with green pods

VILLIERS STEYN; GALLO/GETTYIMAGES.COM; LEENTJIE DU PREEZ

LETTER FROM South Korea

In snowy South Korea, **Desiree Hartney** gained a new appreciation for the dusty heat of a Swartland summer.

When my older sister Gaynor moved to South Korea in March 2022 to teach English, I suddenly had an excuse to travel overseas. She invited us to visit her in December that year. Finally, I had a chance to experience a white Christmas – me, a born-and-bred Swartlander from Malmesbury!

I roped in my baby sister Mary-Beth and my cousin Jarryd – my parents weren't up for such a long flight. But before we could get excited, we had to get the practical stuff out of the way. We spent hours in the queue at Home Affairs in Malmesbury to get new passports. The process went smoothly, except for my passport photo, which got cropped harshly, chopping off my curly hair. I looked like I had half a watermelon on my head, like a silly spectator at a cricket match!

I also had to update my winter wardrobe. Everyone I knew who'd been to Korea warned me: The cold there is a different kind of cold. I stocked up on South Africa's greatest hits, from base layers to a puffer jacket, and I boarded the aeroplane with a suitcase full of new clothes.

We departed Cape Town on Singapore Airlines on Christmas Eve. Our arrival at Incheon International Airport outside Seoul is something I'll never forget – I felt the cold from the aeroplane when I saw the snow on the ground.

I went to South Korea without any expectations. I'm not a K-Pop fan and I don't watch their TV dramas that have become so popular worldwide over the last few years. I knew very little about Korean culture, except for a few titbits that Gaynor had shared. Everything felt very new to me.

Mary-Beth, Jarryd and I stayed with Gaynor in her apartment in Munsan, a quiet town about an hour by train north-east of the capital, Seoul. It was school holidays in Korea during our visit, so Gaynor didn't have to work and we could spend lots of time together.

Our first outing was to the Gyeongbokgung Palace in Seoul, which dates from the late 14th century. The contrast between the historical building and the modern skyscrapers was striking. Some other visitors to the palace wore *hanbok* – traditional garments – that made it feel like we'd gone back centuries in a time machine.

Temperatures often dropped well below freezing while we were in Korea and although my Swartland constitution found it all a bit shocking, I'll never forget the snow under my shoes.

And the black ice underneath the snow...

Korean food alone is enough of a reason to visit the country. I feasted on traditional dishes like *gimbap* (sushi rice with different fillings – it's a staple like sandwiches are in South Africa), *bulgogi* (thin slices of grilled meat in a flavoursome marinade), *japchae* (glass noodles stir-fried with julienne vegetables and meat) and *tteokbokki* (thick rice cakes in a hot red sauce).

For a South African who seldom uses public transport back home, Seoul's railway system was a revelation – and the trains were never late or cancelled.

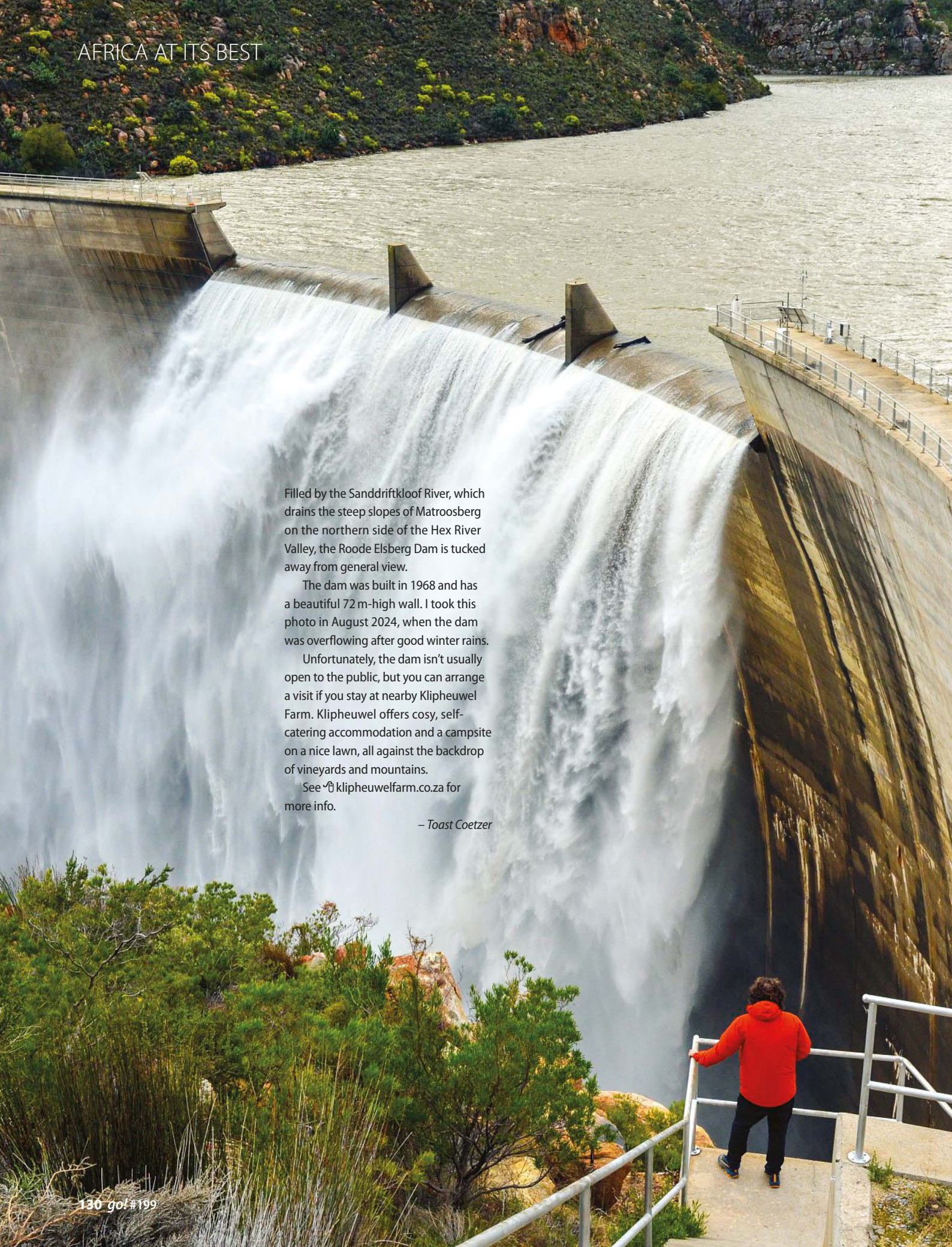
Even though South Korea has been in a cold war with North Korea for decades, there were no sirens or alarms to be heard, except for emergency vehicles attending to normal everyday situations. The other bells and chimes were also fascinating to me: Everything from school bells to washing machines and microwaves play cheerful tunes instead of the beeping sounds we all know. Even in the railway stations, a song alerts you to the approaching train instead of a siren.

It was good to see my sister's life in a foreign land. I appreciated the brief immersion in a new culture, but after a while I started to feel a bit homesick. Something called me back to South Africa. We might have a long list of issues and dramas here, but this place is still home. I was very glad to be back on the dusty ground of Malmesbury two weeks later.

As I walked into the house, I was greeted by something typically South African: loadshedding! The long, hot shower I'd been dreaming of in transit would have to wait...

In January 2025, Des visited South Korea again – and this time she took her parents along.

Temperatures often dropped well below freezing while we were in Korea and although my Swartland constitution found it all a bit shocking, I'll never forget the snow under my shoes.



Filled by the Sanddriftkloof River, which drains the steep slopes of Matroosberg on the northern side of the Hex River Valley, the Roode Elsberg Dam is tucked away from general view.

The dam was built in 1968 and has a beautiful 72 m-high wall. I took this photo in August 2024, when the dam was overflowing after good winter rains.

Unfortunately, the dam isn't usually open to the public, but you can arrange a visit if you stay at nearby Klipheuwel Farm. Klipheuwel offers cosy, self-catering accommodation and a campsite on a nice lawn, all against the backdrop of vineyards and mountains.

See klipheuwelfarm.co.za for more info.

– Toast Coetzer

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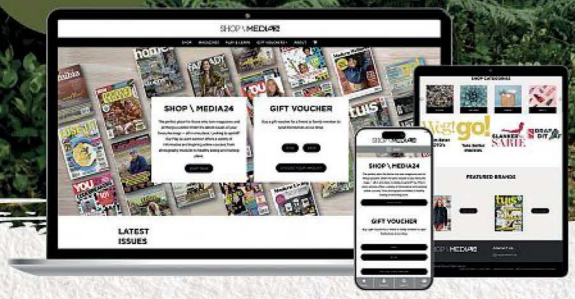


PHOTO Taryn Elliot for Pexels.com

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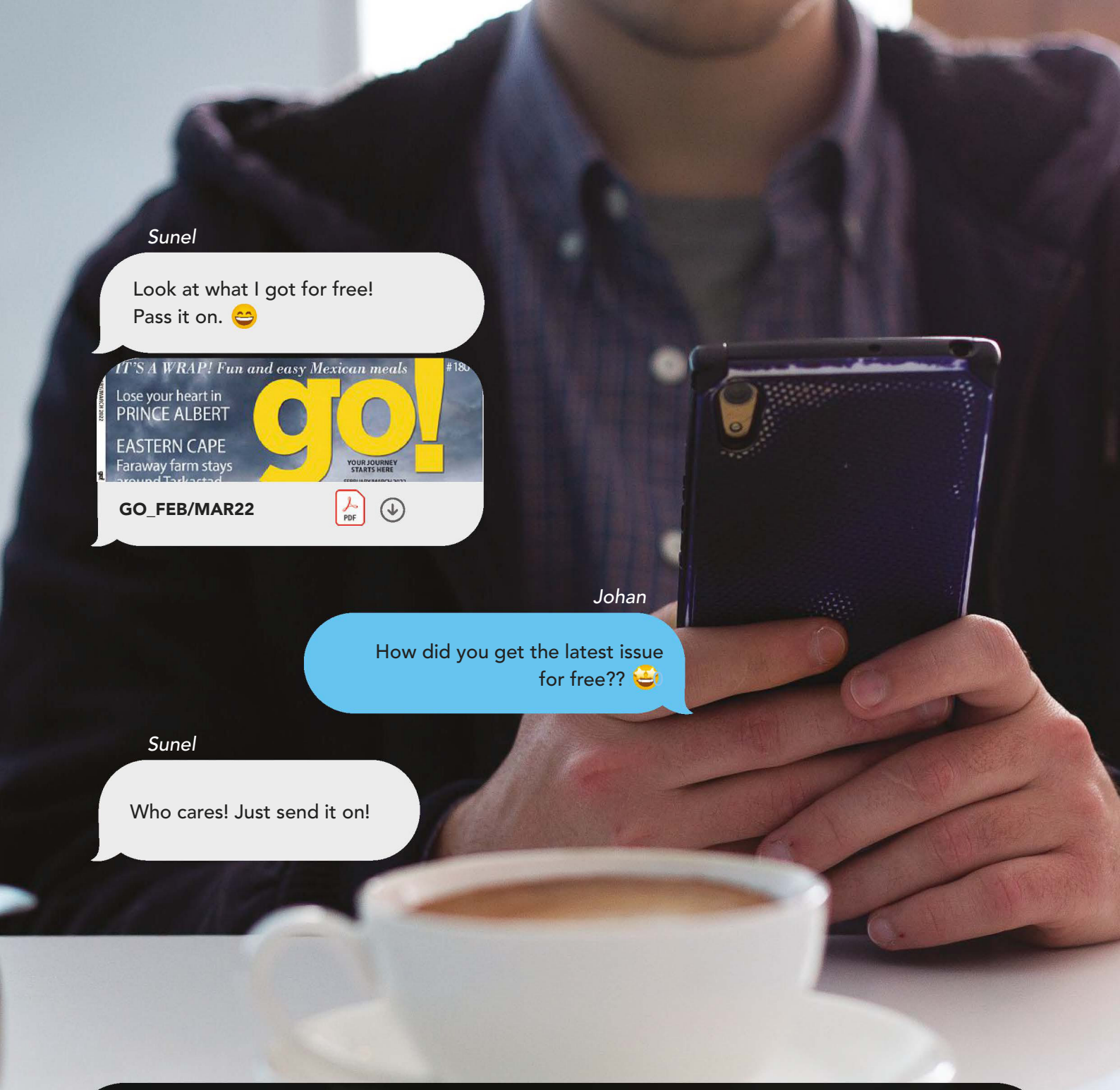
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