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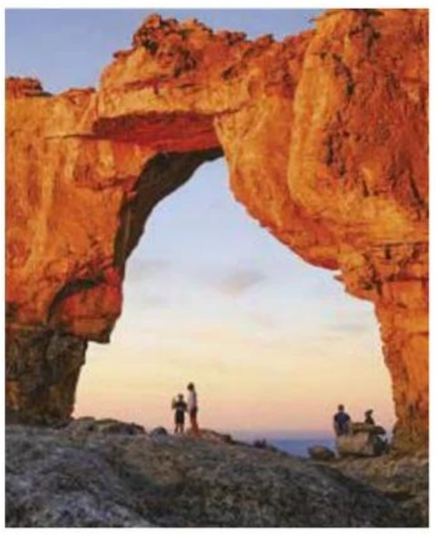
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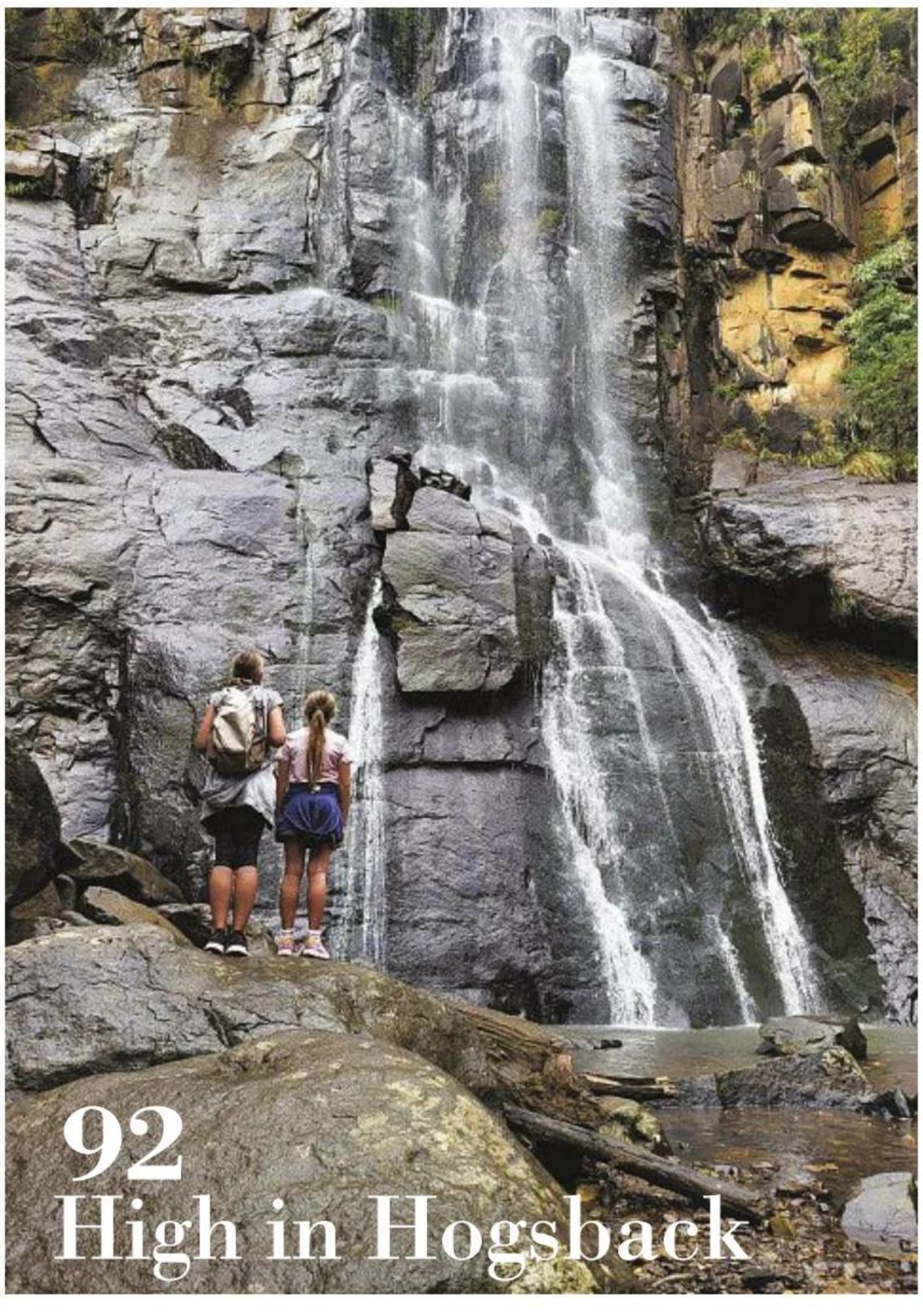
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MADE OF METTLE

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RONEL STEYN

Thank you, Africa

Judging by what happened at some of Europe's most popular tourist destinations this past northern summer, the French writer and philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre may have had a point when he said: "Hell is other people."

In the lean years of the Covid pandemic, you'd hardly have thought that there could be such a thing as "overtourism", but that's exactly what's been happening at popular hotspots like Barcelona, Amsterdam, Athens, Paris and Venice. Thousands of visitors crowd each other – and the locals.

In Amsterdam, the city paid for an advertising campaign encouraging young British men to stay away and party elsewhere. In Barcelona, residents sprayed tourists with water pistols and graffitied "Stay Home" on buildings. In Greece, you had to book a time slot well in advance if you wanted to see a monument like the Acropolis (capped at 20 000 people a day); and day visitors to Venice had to pay an entrance fee just to be allowed into the city.

I don't know about you, but such a squash of people in a place that doesn't make you feel welcome, and for which you pay a fortune for the dubious privilege of visiting, doesn't sound like a holiday to me.

It makes me grateful once again for the natural beauty and space we have right here. The opportunity to escape and just breathe is not something to take for granted. If there are too many cars at the waterhole, just wait a while, or drive on to the next one. Is there already a tent pitched at the Wolfberg Arch? Don't worry, the Cederberg has more than enough space for another.

Whether you hike through this unique mountain wilderness like Sophia van Taak did (p 44), or if you venture further into the national parks of Zambia like Lucille Botha (p 34), or even if you ride a motorbike all the way to the Congo like Jean Cooper and De Witt Oosthuizen (p 118), it's still possible to find a piece of heaven right here in Africa. •

DON'T MISS OUR NEXT ISSUE!
The December/January magazine will be on sale at your retailer from 29 November 2024.

Pierre

PIERRE STEYN
PSteyn@media24.com

BEHIND THE SCENES



Zambia's wilderness stole freelance journalist **Lucille Botha's** heart. Read the article on page 34.

What are the road conditions like in Zambia? The bigger roads aren't too bad, but as soon as you turn off them, you should be prepared for anything. The D104 tar road between Chipata and Mfuwe was riddled with potholes, for example. Animals on the road – especially goats – are often a problem. The M10 tar road between Katima Mulilo and Livingstone will also make you swear out loud.

How easy is it to find fuel and supplies? We didn't experience any problems because we travelled out and back from Lusaka, where the shops have everything you need. The seasonal fruit and vegetables sold on the roadside were delicious – especially watermelon, tomatoes and sweet potatoes.

Imported products can be pricey, but local goods like bananas and beef are affordable. We sometimes struggled to find bread and bread rolls. The Butcher Block (admin@butcherblock.co.zm) in Lusaka sells quality meat and you can order beforehand to pick up later. Alcohol is heavily taxed so bring your own if possible.

What surprised you the most? Nothing can prepare you for the abundance of wildlife and birds in Zambia, and how close you can camp to them. It's also very special to see subspecies we don't have in South Africa, like Thornicroft's giraffe and Cookson's wildebeest. And the freshwater crayfish! We prepared the tails in all sorts of ways, from cooked in lemon and garlic butter to tempura-style.

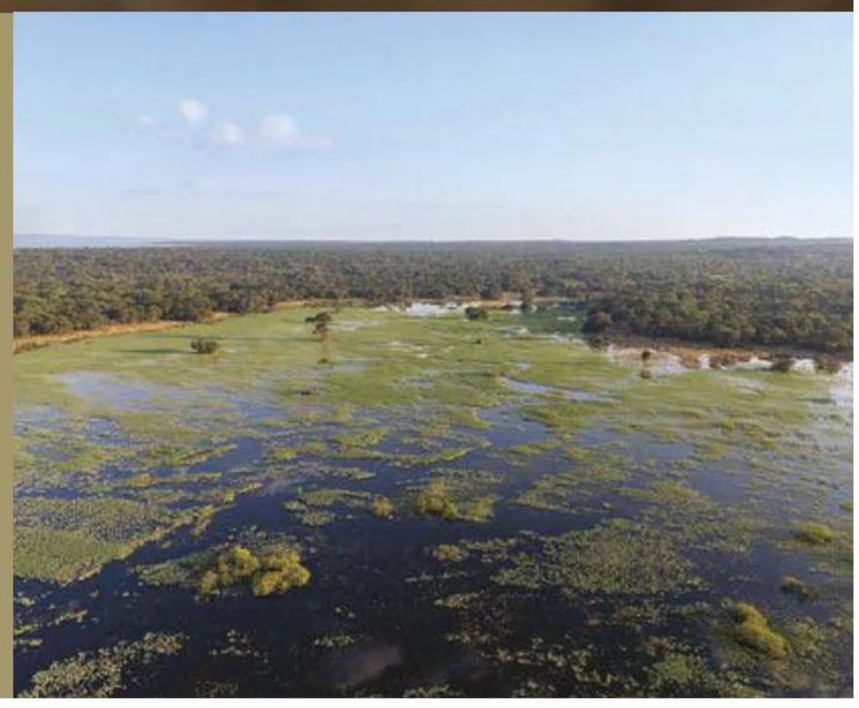
Your next trip? We want to go to Zambia again! Our kids are young so we have to do these kinds of trips during school holidays. We found Zambia to be quieter than Namibia and Botswana as far as camping is concerned.

Next time we also want to include Liuwa Plain National Park and Mana Pools in Zim. If we go back to Kafue, we want to stay at Kasabushi Camp – an eco-camp on the river that looks amazing.

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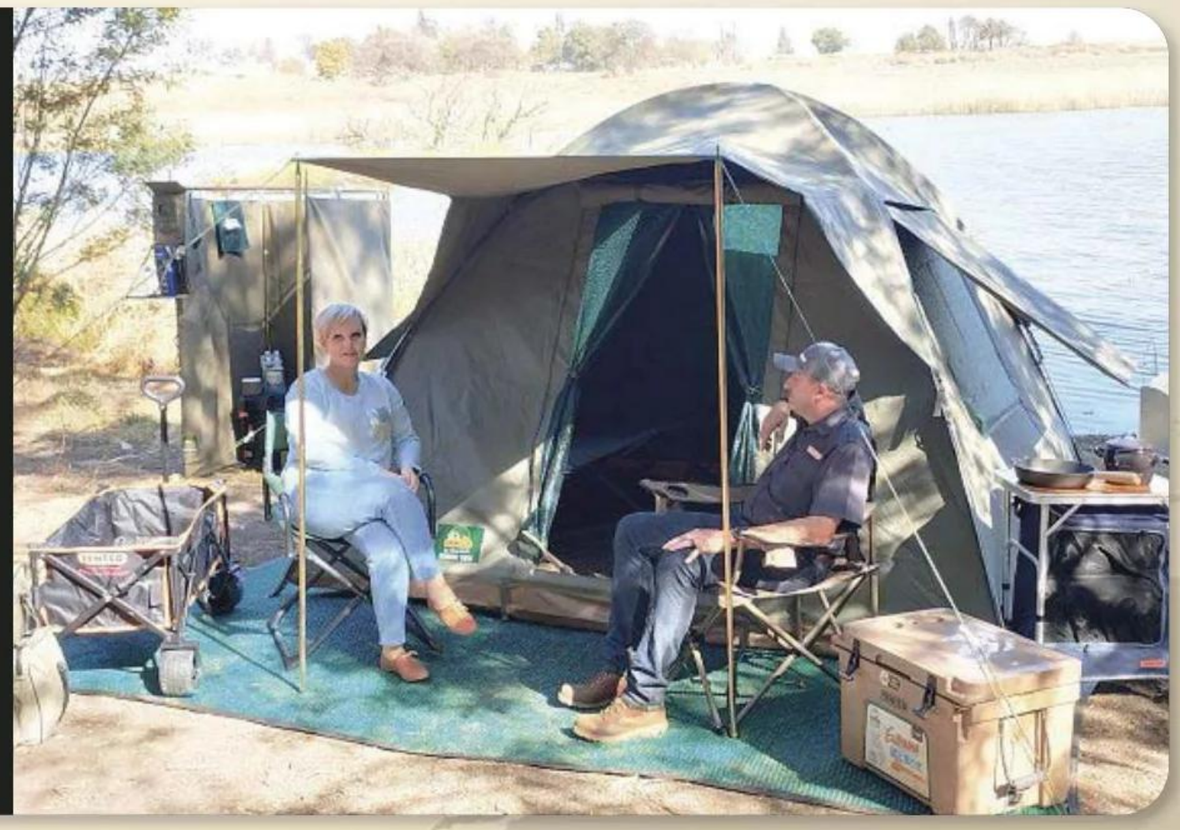
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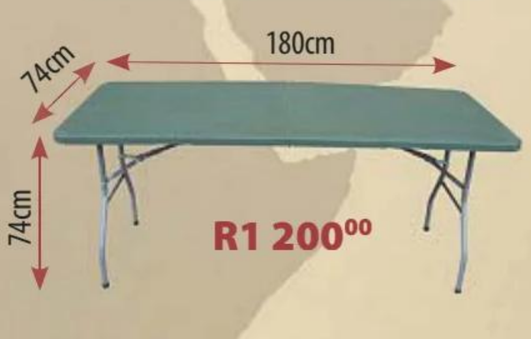
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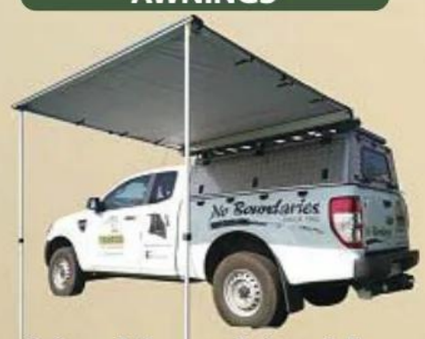
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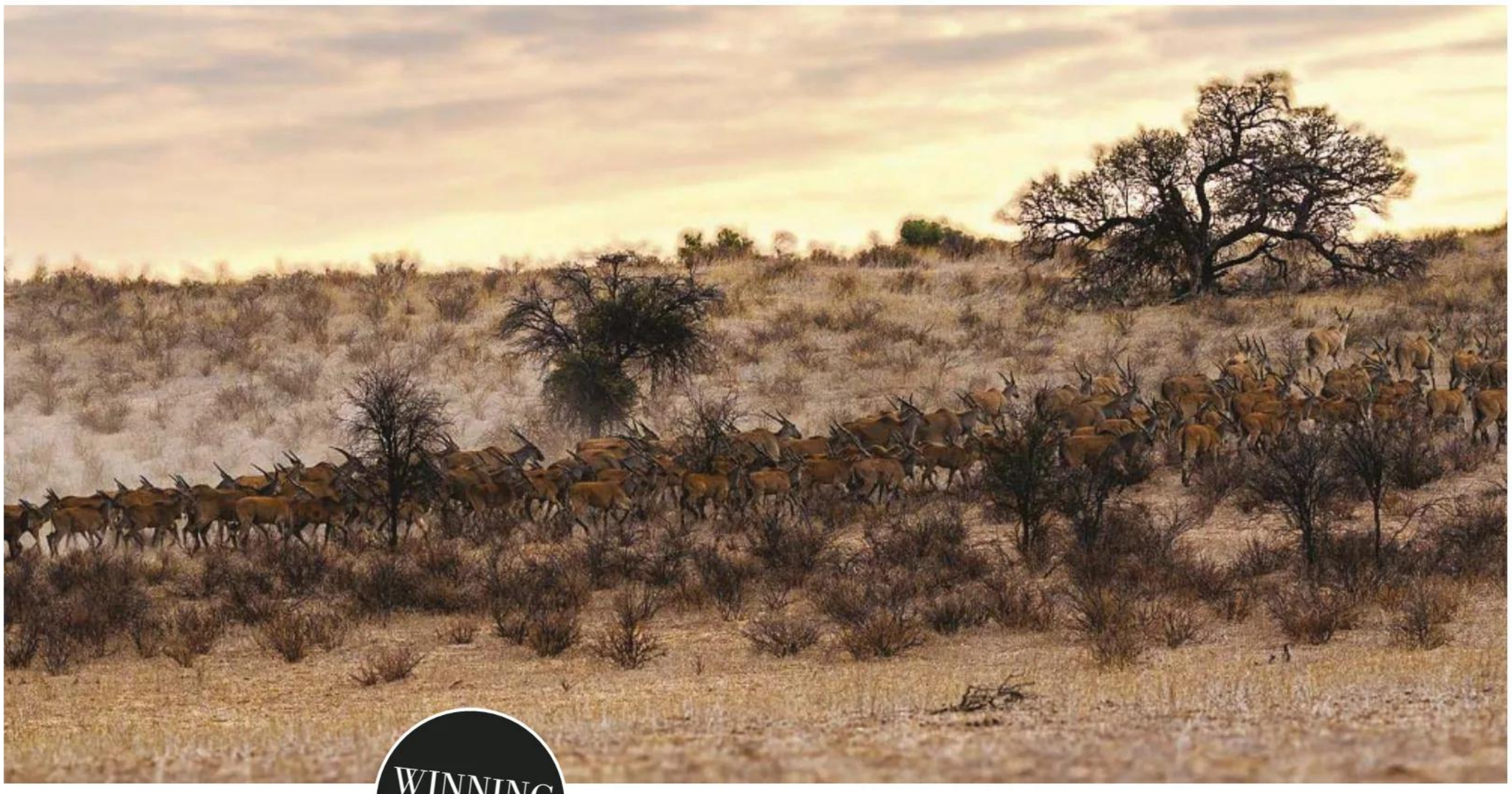
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LETTERS

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



WINNING LETTER

More eland than you can count!

Last September I visited the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. Early one morning, I saw a huge cloud of dust when I arrived at Veertiende Boorgat near Mata-Mata. Another vehicle had approached from the opposite direction and spooked a big herd of eland at the waterhole – they headed for the dunes.

It was difficult to assess how many there were, but there seemed to be at least 150 antelope! I've been going to the Kgalagadi twice a year since 2019 and I've never seen anything like this before.

GERALDO ALLAIS, George

WRITE TO US & WIN!

Geraldo wins a Zartek TX-8 two-way radio twin-pack, worth R1 299.
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Hold your horses

I love the dunes around the Kabeljous Lagoon in Jeffreys Bay – I go walk there to clear my head. One morning in July I was on the beach just after sunrise. A rider and horse from Papiesfontein Beach Horse Trails made for a beautiful sight against the dunes.

The lagoon was fairly high, but I decided to brave the cold and wade through. What a memorable morning!

RIANA VILJOEN, Herolds Bay



A mother's love

I'm very lucky to live in the Okavango Delta with my family – we're based at Xigera Safari Lodge in Moremi and the wildlife encounters are incredible.

We found this lion pride on a cool winter afternoon on a game drive towards the south of the lodge concession. They were relaxing around a termite mount in the shade of a sausage tree. The four lionesses were hoping to rest a little, but the six cubs clearly didn't share this sentiment. They were pestering the adults, climbing over them, biting their tails and practising their pouncing skills.

This little cub went from lioness to lioness, first snuggling and then moving in for some milk. It's incredible to see these strong, ferocious females being so tender and caring towards their tiny cubs.

CARIKE SEAGER, Xigera Safari Lodge, Botswana

Little but fierce!

It's not every day you get to witness a fight in the Kgalagadi… I saw these two ground squirrels square off in May 2024. Their "boxing ring" was a patch of dirt next to the road near the Kamqua waterhole between Mata-Mata and Twee Rivieren.

We go to the Kruger every year, but this was our first time in the Kgalagadi. We didn't see as many animals, but there were so many beautiful, "smaller" moments like this one.

CHRISTA ROSSOUW, Cape Town





Tienuurkop now has a summit book

I want to thank Fiona McIntosh for a great article about Tienuurkop in Marloth Nature Reserve near Swellendam (issue #194). In the article, she mentions that there was no beacon or summit book where hikers could record their names.

I'm a founding member of the Friends of Marloth association. We're a group of volunteers that help the reserve with tasks like marking trails, putting up signs with tree names and removing alien plant species. A few of my hiking buddies and I climbed the peak in July and built a small cairn at the top – I'm standing next to it in the photo. We also put a tin with a summit book at the base of the cairn. Now hikers can write down their names!

I've been handling the summit books on nearby Twaalfuurkop for years – in June I retrieved two full books and left a new one there. It makes for interesting reading, especially when you see people from all over the world have been on the peaks!

THOMAS JOUBERT, Swellendam





Perfect timing

We're a Hungarian family and we've been living in South Africa for almost two years. We arrived in January 2023 and immediately found *go!* magazine because we love to travel and hike. Your magazine is our ultimate guide on our travels: We buy every issue.

We started visiting the national parks and soon realised we could see them all during our stay. That's now officially our goal and we're almost there: only three left!

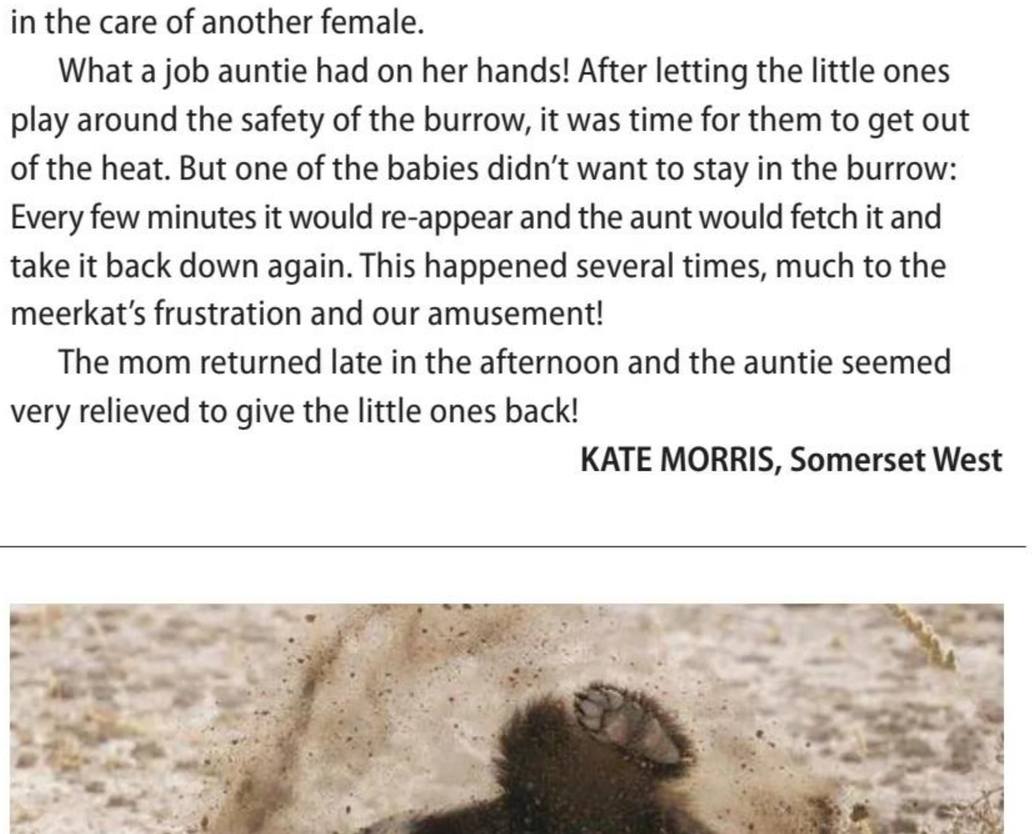
I'm writing to let you know how good your timing is: As soon as we decided to go to the West Coast National Park, your 2024 West Coast special edition appeared in the shops. We had a wonderful time in the park; I took this photo of my family on the trail to the shipwreck near Tsaarsbank. From left to right is our daughter Ágnes, my wife Judit, son Hugó and our younger daughter Regina.

And then, as we prepared for a trip to Namaqua National Park and the |Ai-|Ais/Richtersveld Transfrontier Park in September, issue #195 had the Richtersveld on the cover!

Thank you for all the stories and inspiration – we'll miss *go!* when we return to Hungary in December.

IMRE BOHNER, East London

Our new West Coast guide (R135) is still on shelf and full of ideas for your next trip to this region. You can also order a copy online: media24shop.com



Meerkat cuteness

We camped at Mata-Mata in the Kgalagadi in October 2023 and enjoyed watching a family of meerkats in their burrow nearby. The mom had six babies. When she went looking for food, she left them in the care of another female.

What a job auntie had on her hands! After letting the little ones play around the safety of the burrow, it was time for them to get out of the heat. But one of the babies didn't want to stay in the burrow: Every few minutes it would re-appear and the aunt would fetch it and take it back down again. This happened several times, much to the meerkat's frustration and our amusement!

The mom returned late in the afternoon and the auntie seemed very relieved to give the little ones back!

KATE MORRIS, Somerset West



Nest is best

During a trip to the Kruger in January, I explored the roads around Shingwedzi rest camp. I was driving on the S134 loop when I came across this southern ground-hornbill.

Most times, these birds roam the veld foraging for food, but on this particular occasion, this fellow was gathering nesting material. He just picked up more and more leaves as he walked around!

A little while later he crossed the road behind me and flew into a tree which seemed to be his home.

STU BOWIE, Centurion



Eat my dust!

Friends and I recently spent a weekend in Etosha National Park in Namibia. We were driving along the Ondongab road towards Halali rest camp late one morning. The corrugations were getting to us and the sun was hot, but we stopped when I saw a honey badger in the veld.

We watched as the honey badger crossed the road. Then it started to dig in the soil and eventually took a dust bath. There were stones and sand flying everywhere!

In the end it even found something to eat. It was being very mysterious and kept its back to us so we couldn't see what it was munching. Then it disappeared into the veld.

MARIKE VAN WYK, Windhoek, Namibia

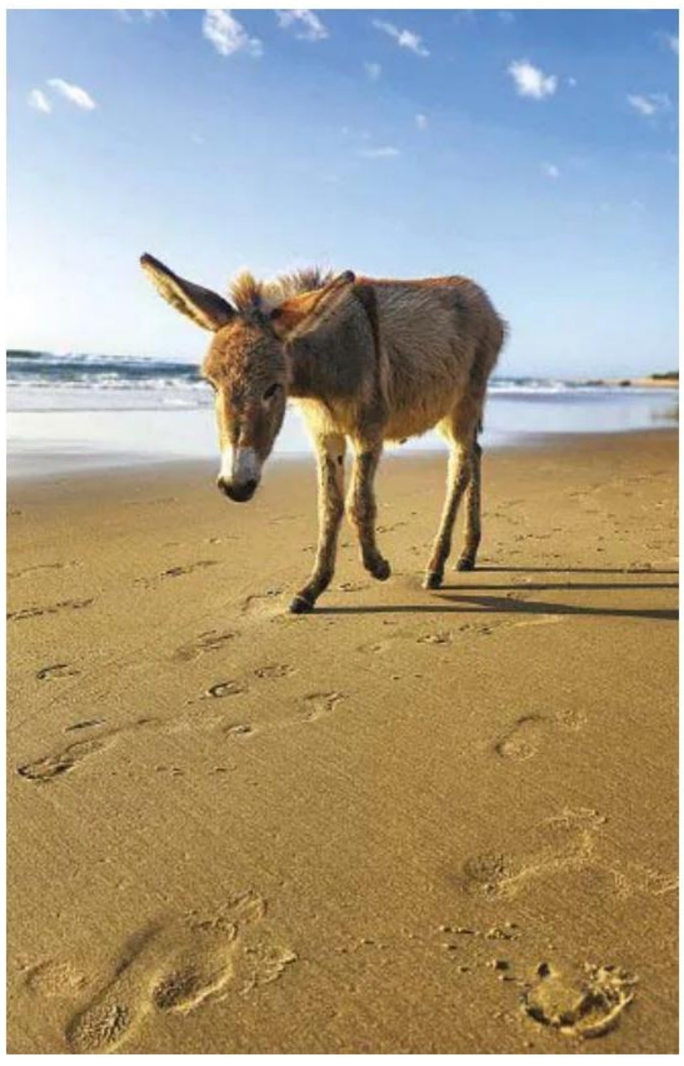


On the lookout

I live in Leeupoort Vakansiedorp, a small community between Bela-Bela and Thabazimbi, and took this photo on an empty plot opposite my house early one morning in July. The vervet monkeys were playing in the trees and there were also many birds about.

This monkey sat high in a marula tree and the starling perched on a branch right above its head. There was also a southern yellow-billed hornbill in the background. I found it very funny – they looked like a branch manager and his security guards to me!

ALIDA POTGIETER, Leeupoort



It's a sea donkey!

My family and I spent the July holidays in Ponta Malongane in Mozambique. We went for a run along the beach in the mornings and came across a herd of donkeys every day, being moved along between two villages by a herder.

You often hear about cattle on the beach, now it's the donkeys' turn!

BARTHLO BARNARD, Pretoria



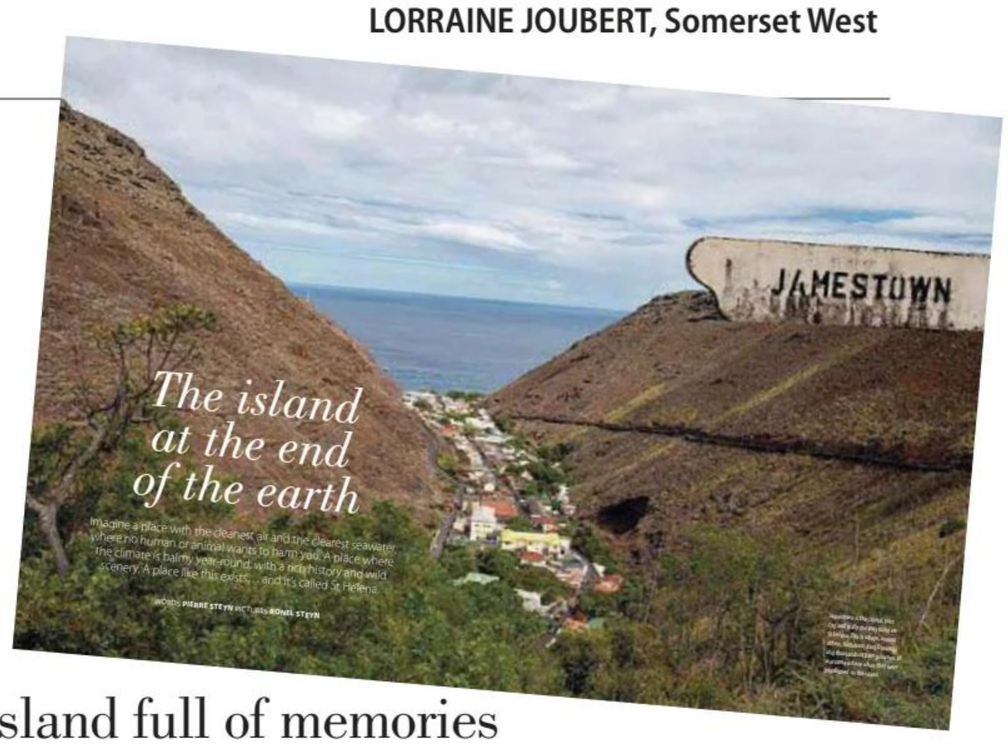
Let's rally around raptors

Earlier this year, I listened to a radio show about the re-introduction of vultures to the Eastern Cape. I learnt how endangered these birds are across the country; my husband Hannes and I were very concerned about their plight.

So, when we visited the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park in May, vultures were at the top of the list of animals we wanted to see. I was so passionate about the idea I even bought a T-shirt with a vulture on it!

We were driving from Mata-Mata to the Kamqua picnic site when we noticed this white-backed vulture in the veld, gathering materials to build a nest. Hannes took the photo.

LORRAINE JOUBERT, Somerset West



An island full of memories

I was so excited to read Pierre Steyn's article, "The island at the end of the earth" in issue #194. I lived on St Helena Island when I was about nine years old – I'm now 86! My parents worked as Salvation Army officers and we lived in Jamestown.

I remember Jonathan the Seychelles giant tortoise with affection. My parents were once invited to a garden party at Plantation House, the official residence of the British governor. Being a child, I was thoroughly bored with the proceedings and I ran off into the field along with other children. And there was Jonathan. We hopped on his back and he took us for a ride into the bushes!

Jacob's Ladder was also unforgettable. When you climbed the 699 steps up and down again, your legs would shake uncontrollably. My dad would go to the Half Tree Hollow district to conduct church services one evening a week. If the moon was shining brightly, we'd be able to see him coming down the ladder in his white Salvation Army uniform.

I've been a musician for most of my professional life. I had my first music lesson on the island with a lady called Miss Smith. Thanks for the memories!

DAVE WELLARD

Long in the tooth



I took this photo on the S90 near Satara in the Kruger Park. It's not the best shot, but look at those massive tusks! This guy must be one of the Kruger's new generation of tuskers.

CHARLES CRONJE, Pretoria

Q&A

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

Part of the donkey family?



MARIETJIE CRONJE from Bloemhof writes: I saw this roan antelope in Mokala National Park near Kimberley. From behind it looked like a donkey with its big, floppy ears. I read somewhere that the roan shares DNA with an extinct antelope called a bluebuck. Is this true, and can you tell me more about the roan antelope?

Wildlife expert LD VAN ESSEN says: The extinct bluebuck belongs to the same genus – *Hippotragus* – as roan and sable antelopes. The bluebuck was once thought to be a subspecies of the roan, but genetic studies have since confirmed that it was a separate species and actually genetically closer to the sable.

The roan is one of the biggest antelope species in Africa. It belongs to the tribe *Hippotragini*, the so-called "horse antelopes", which also includes the genera *Addax* and *Oryx*. These antelopes all have striking facial colourations and horse-like characteristics including long legs, a solid body and a relatively thick, muscular neck.

Roan antelope occur in groups of up to 35 individuals, but herd sizes of 6 – 15 are more common. A herd consists of a single dominant bull and a group of cows and their calves. There's a hierarchy among the cows, with one dominant cow as the leader of the females. The bulls have a shoulder height of up to 1,4 m and the cows 1,3 m. The average weight for a bull is about 270 kg; for a cow, it's between 170 kg and 210 kg.

According to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, there are about 60 000 adult roan antelope in Africa. The largest populations are found in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Zambia and Tanzania. Populations seem to be stable in some areas, but have decreased in others.

In South Africa, there are only about 70 roan antelope in the Kruger Park and several hundred in other conservation areas and on private game farms in Mpumalanga, Limpopo and the Northern Cape.



ID, please!

KEVIN NEL from Arniston writes: I came across this insect in the veld in the Overberg. Any idea what it is?

Entomologist DUNCAN MACFADYEN says: This is a longhorn beetle – there are more than 900 species of this beetle in South Africa. It can be identified by its exceptionally long antennae, which are usually at least half as long as its body. The antennae are thread-like and flexible and are used like feelers to find food, a mate and places to lay eggs. The antennae also detect vibrations in the air to alert the beetle to nearby predators.

The diurnal species of longhorn are often brightly coloured in metallic greens, blues, reds and yellows, but the nocturnal species are more sombre. The female is often larger than the male and has longer, curved mandibles. They use their mandibles to cut through wood to lay their eggs inside.

Longhorn beetles feed on the stems and roots of dead or dying herbaceous plants and semi-woody plants. They play a vital role in a healthy ecosystem because they help with the breakdown of dead wood and the return of nutrients to the soil.

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CHECK THIS

Head out on a boat on the Chobe River in Botswana and you're almost guaranteed great sightings of elephants, hippos and buffaloes. But the birdlife is just as spectacular.

Pygmy geese are easily overlooked and they're devilishly difficult to photograph in flight. I managed to snap this shot on a trip with Pangolin Photo Safaris (pangolinphoto.com).

Look out for the next edition of our special travel guide, *go! Botswana*, on sale from November.

PICTURE **TOAST COETZER**



The bus of wonders

Decades ago, the SA Railways bus was a connection to the outside world for many people who lived in remote areas in South Africa. **Deon Strydom** remembers his first encounter.

ILLUSTRATION **NICOLENE LOUW**

When I was a child, my grandparents lived on a farm in the Baviaanskloof. Their house was humble, but it had the most beautiful belhambra tree outside – we played between its roots with our toy cars for hours.

My grandparents were self-sufficient. Everything they needed came from the farm. They slaughtered their own goats, ate the eggs laid by their chickens, and all their vegetables came from my grandfather's fields. What they couldn't grow, they traded with other families and farmers in the district. My grandmother baked bread, rusks and biscuits. They only bought flour, sugar and coffee.

It was 1961 and I was nearly six years old. A few months previously, South Africa had split from Britain and declared itself an independent republic. When we arrived at the farm after a three-hour drive from Port Elizabeth, I immediately noticed that the house had new ceilings. The thatched roof and its exposed beams were hidden behind white ceiling board. When I asked how the ceilings had got there, my grandmother answered: "On the bus."

It was a valid question because everyone knew that the wreck of my grandfather's Chevy was still lying next to the road near Willowmore – he'd collided with a train at the crossing years ago.

My grandmother had a beautiful

garden fenced with netting to keep the goats and chickens out of her flowerbeds. She ordered her bulbs from Kirchhoffs in the Cape and the bus brought them to the Baviaanskloof.

There were new things in their house every holiday. My grandmother explained how they were now on a government pension and could afford more than before. She ordered linen and towels from Volpes in Port Elizabeth and she no longer had to have all her dresses made by Tant Nellie-Naas because she could order them from Charles Velkes in Cape Town. All these wonderful things arrived by bus.

Indeed, "the bus" was my grandparents' connection to the outside world. It brought the post and took farm products like eggs and cream to Willowmore. It also transported farming necessities from the co-op to the Kloof.

There were double-decker buses in PE, but they only transported people. I didn't understand the concept of a bus that was more like a truck. I had never seen one before.

One time, when I was a little older, my grandmother sent me to the road to collect something that the bus was going to drop off. My cousin joined me. Your package was usually left next to the main road at the turn-off to your farm; you could collect it there yourself, or the first person who passed would bring it to you.

My cousin and I set off and waited for the bus. We heard its engine long before we saw it. It came around a bend in the distance but dipped out of sight again as it drove through the last drift.

The bus was huge and red, covered in more than a 100 km of dust, which it had picked up on the long road from Willowmore. We had to crane our necks to look up at it.

It pulled over and the door opened. Inside, I noticed there was only one row of seats behind the driver and his assistant. When my aunt from Johannesburg came to visit, she took the train to Willowmore and then came here on the bus – she must have sat on those seats. But otherwise, it looked like a giant panel van with lots of space for packages.

The bus was huge and red, covered in more than a 100 km of dust, which it had picked up on the long road from Willowmore. We had to crane our necks to look up at it.

I was in awe. The bus had double wheels at the back, like a truck, and the underside was dark red and still dripping with water after its passage through the drift. What confused me the most were the letters on the side: SAR&H, which stood for South African Railways and Harbours. The same letters were printed on all the vehicles and goods wagons in the harbour in Port Elizabeth. This made no sense to me – we were in the Baviaanskloof! There were no railway lines here, not to mention a harbour...

Later, my father explained that the Railways provided a bus service where their railway lines didn't reach. I was impressed. He said the bus departed from the Willowmore station every Monday with packages from the railway shed and the town's co-op. It would drive to Keerom, delivering packages all the way. The bus driver would overnight there and drive back on Tuesday morning, collecting everything that had to go to Willowmore along the way. It carried tanned sheepskins and cattle hides and farming produce like my grandmother's cream and eggs. But the most important cargo was the stack of post bags filled with letters and packages picked up at the farming shops at Coleskeplaas, Zandvlakte and Studtis.

Wednesday was a day off, then the bus repeated its route on Thursday and Friday. There was no service on weekends.

Because the road through the Kloof was narrow and the bus was wide, you made sure you never needed to travel when it was doing its rounds. You didn't want to squeeze past from the front and you didn't want to drive behind it either, because there were precious few places where you could overtake and you'd end up eating dust for miles before it stopped somewhere.

After that first time, it was a while before I saw the bus again. Many years later, we came across an accident scene where the bus and a vehicle had collided in Nuwekloof. Luckily, the people who lived in the Kloof back then were sensible enough to drive slowly. The car was damaged but the people inside were mostly unscathed. We took them to the nearest farm where the car was repaired with galvanised wire and they could continue their journey.

The bus service stopped in later years. There were fewer people living in the Kloof. My grandparents had moved to Willowmore. Many other farmers had done the same; or they'd moved to Patensie or Port Elizabeth. The government was buying up the farms – a process that had started when the Kouga Dam was built.

(The dam was renamed in the 1970s, after a National Party MP called Paul Sauer, but the name never really stuck and the Baviaanskloof rejoiced when it became the Kouga Dam again after 1994.)

The Kloof was no longer the Kloof of my childhood. Catching eels, riding on donkey carts, milking goats, fetching water from the river, filling the car using the manual pump at Oom Frits's shop... These were all things of the past, just like that big, red bus.

IN BRIEF

COMPILED BY **VANIA JOOSTE**



Take your pooch to the Museum of Dogs

They're not called man's best friend for nothing… Millions of people know what a huge role dogs can play in our lives – as companions, protectors and workers. Now there's a new museum to celebrate our four-legged friends!

The Museum of Dogs focuses on the relationship between humans and canines and is the first of its kind. It's the brainchild of Karel van der Vyver, who grew up loving dogs and wanted a way to honour them. Visitors can look forward to photo exhibits by photographer Emma O'Brien, ceramic sculptures by Tania Babb, and stories about world leaders and their dogs, like former US president John F Kennedy and his dog Pushinka. (The dog was a gift from Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev and there were fears it had been used as a ruse to smuggle a listening device into the White House!) Members of the public can also submit their own stories and photos of their dogs to be added to the exhibits.

And best of all? If your fur baby is well behaved and on a leash, he or she can come along – just keep that wagging tail away from the ceramics!

Where? 95 Keerom Street, Cape Town
Opening times: Tuesday to Friday from 10 am to 5 pm.
Cost: R100 per adult; R50 per child under 16.
More info: museumofdogs.co



Do you know your birds? Can you identify this species?
Clue: It was photographed in the Bushveld near Bela-Bela…
Use your bird guide or app and see if you can figure it out.
Turn to page 117 for the answer…

New World Heritage Sites for SA

UNESCO recently listed three new sites in South Africa that now have World Heritage status: the Diepkloof Rock Shelter in Elands Bay; the Pinnacle Point Site Complex in Mossel Bay; and the Sibhudu Cave near KwaDukuza. All three sites show signs of early human life from the Stone Age and were nominated in the category, "The Emergence of Modern Human Behaviour".

Book a guided tour of the Diepkloof Rock Shelter via the Elands Bay Museum on ✆ 072 447 4936 (WhatsApp) or book a tour of Pinnacle Point on ✆ 079 640 0004. The Sibhudu Cave is currently not open to the public.

There are now 12 World Heritage Sites in South Africa, including the Vredefort Dome and Robben Island. You can see the full list at whc.unesco.org

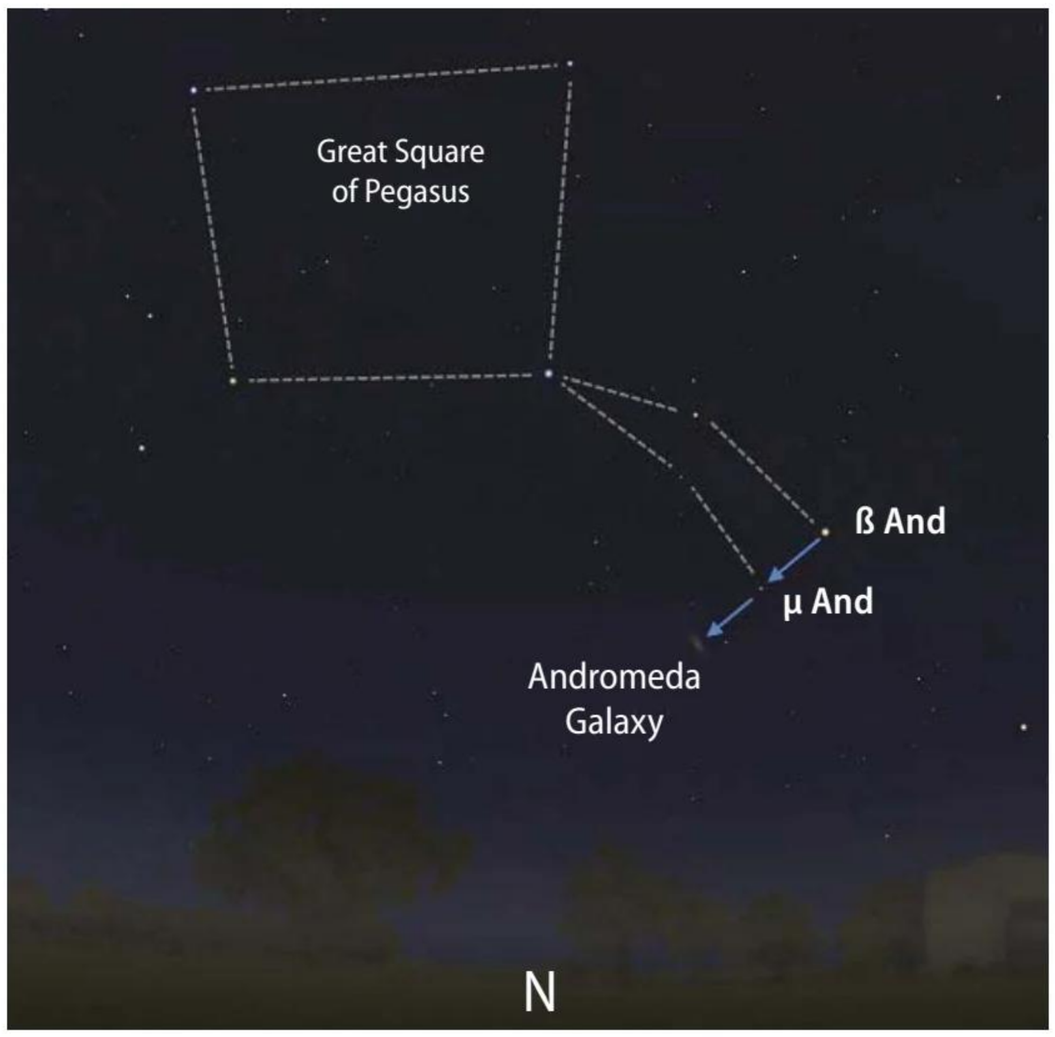
DIEPKLOOF ROCK SHELTER



ELANDS BAY MUSEUM



NIGHT WATCH



STELLARIUM.ORG

How far can you see?

A question I'm often asked about my telescope is, "How far can you see with it?" I usually respond with a counter-question, "How far can you see *without* it?"

Take the sun, for example. You can see it with ease even though it's 150 million kilometres from earth! Many stars, thousands of light years away, are also visible to the naked eye. (One light year is about 9,46 trillion kilometres…)

Here's a fun fact for your next dinner party: The most distant object visible to the naked eye is the Andromeda Galaxy, which is 2,5 million light years away! (The calculator catches fire when you try calculate how many kilometres that is.) When viewed from the southern hemisphere, Andromeda appears in the far north of the night sky. The best time to see it in South Africa is mid-October to end November. In October it will be visible from midnight; through November it will start to appear earlier in the evening.

As to be expected from something so far away, Andromeda isn't very bright. If you want to see it, find a dark place with a clear view of the northern horizon. Time your attempt with the moon – try when the moon isn't up yet (or after it's gone down) as its light can overwhelm Andromeda's faint glow.

Use the star map above to find the galaxy. First, locate the Great Square of Pegasus – four fairly bright stars set far apart above the northern horizon. Find the bottom right star and follow the two lines of stars until you reach the stars named β And and µ And. Extend the line between those two stars and you'll find Andromeda.

If you're struggling with the naked eye, try using binoculars. This will help train your eyes on where to look and what to look for, making it easier to spot Andromeda without binoculars afterwards.

If you do manage to see it, give yourself a pat on the back! If not, try again in a darker spot with less light pollution.

– Willie Koorts



GALLO/GETTYIMAGES.COM

This year, National Garden Day will be on Sunday 20 October. To celebrate, invite friends over and have a tea party in your own garden! Share your photos on social media with the hashtag #GardenDaySA or WhatsApp 074 288 1487 to join in the fun.

In the next few months, you can also visit gardens across the country to enjoy the beautiful flowers, trees and plants grown by others. These open garden shows all work on the same principle: You buy a ticket, get a map of the town and visit the participating green spaces. The funds raised by the ticket sales often go to a good cause. Here are some to look forward to:

1 September – 8 December
Blackwood's Open Midlands Gardens. R80 per person. For the next three months, you can visit show gardens in the KZN Midlands almost every weekend. The weekends of 19 – 20 October and 25 – 26 October will have the most open gardens. Visit blackwoods.co.za for a list.

21 September – 6 October
Chelsea Flower Show in Stanford. South Africa's floral exhibits won three awards at this year's show – you can see them locally at 32 Queen Victoria Street. From R175 per person. grootbos.com

15 – 17 October
Franschhoek Open Gardens. R200 per person. franschhoekopengardens.co.za

19 – 20 October
Johannesburg Garden Club Open Garden. R100 per person. "Johannesburg Garden Club" on Facebook

Greyton Rose and Garden Fair. R180 for two people. "Greyton Rose and Garden Fair" on Facebook

25 – 27 October
Bedford Country Gardens. You pay for entry at each garden gate – it's about R20 per person. bedford.co.za

26 – 27 October
Greyton Rose and Garden Fair (yes, go again!)

2 November
George Open Gardens. R70 per person. georgeopengardens.co.za

8 – 10 November
Bedford Country Gardens

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- Countersunk lid design

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- V-shaped reinforced front and back

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- Stacks on new and old design box

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- New design, improved **STRONG** clip
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- Rectangular hole for clip to snap/ lock
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- **Available separately**

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- Fits Tentco Box
- Converts normal box to an extended box (No need to buy a separate box)
- Complete with Tentco Box clips

Remove lid only



OR
Remove lid with extension





Clips onto the box



- Packs flat when not in use
- 4 Pieces makes 1 extension



- Holds wine / spirit bottles upright
- Holds approximately 20 bottles



Flex around the corner

6 DIVIDER: To fit Tentco Box



Divides into 6 compart-ments

Remove dividers to create bigger compartments (2 Large & 2 small)

Contents not included

Contents not included

- To fit inside the Tentco Box
- 4mm correx
- Divides box into 6 or 4 compartments

20 DIVIDER:



Fits up to 20 Bottles

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- To fit inside the Tentco Box
- 4mm correx

Use with Tentco Box Extension to fit larger bottles (up to 1L)

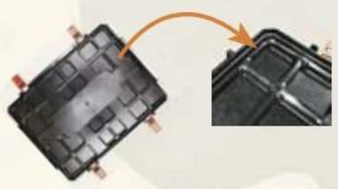
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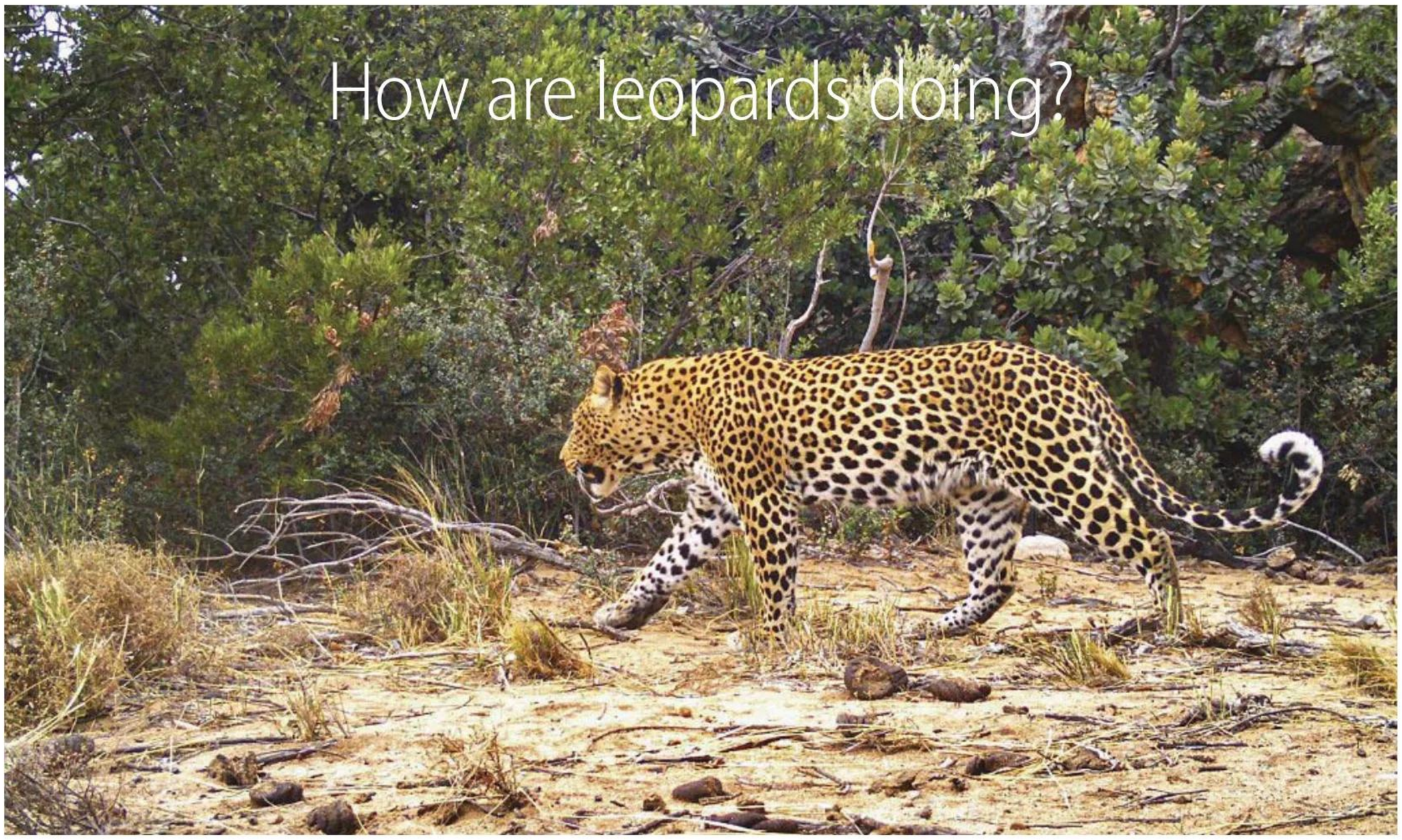
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LEOPARD LOUNGE



CAPE LEOPARD TRUST

When assessing how well a species is doing, you can turn to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the global authority on the status of the natural world and the actions needed to protect it. The IUCN also compiles the Red List of Threatened Species (iucnredlist.org).

Evaluating a species' risk of extinction takes years and involves many scientists and conservationists. They must conduct a rigorous analysis of several factors to determine the level of risk that a species may disappear entirely. Based on this assessment, species are categorised according to a scale, which goes as follows: Extinct; Extinct in the Wild; Critically Endangered; Endangered; Vulnerable; Near Threatened; Least Concern; Data Deficient.

In June 2024, the IUCN Red List published an updated global status assessment for the leopard. This update is the most comprehensive study of the status of *Panthera pardus* ever conducted.

The findings are concerning. Although leopards are the most resilient of the big cats, their numbers have declined by more than 30% since the early 2000s. They've disappeared from large parts of their historic range and are no longer found in 26 countries where they once roamed.

Overall, leopards as a species are classified as Vulnerable, indicating a fairly high risk of extinction due to rapid population decline and other factors. However, the outlook varies among the different subspecies.

For instance, the Indian leopard is faring comparatively well, with a population of more than 15 000. This subspecies was actually downlisted from Vulnerable to Near Threatened. African and Sri Lankan leopards are both listed as Vulnerable.

The Javan leopard was also downlisted, from Critically Endangered to Endangered, but even so, only about 320 individuals remain. Despite the downgrade, the Javan leopard's situation remains precarious. The Persian leopard, also Endangered, appears to be doing relatively well, with the big cats reappearing in areas where they have not been seen for many years.

The other three subspecies are all Critically Endangered, just one step from extinction. The Indochinese leopard in Southeast Asia faces severe threats from poaching, habitat loss and a lack of prey. The small remaining population could disappear within the next few years. The Arabian leopard is also in dire straits, with fewer than 90 mature individuals left. The Amur leopard, found in northern China and the Russian Far East, remains Critically Endangered, but its outlook is more hopeful: Its population has rebounded from fewer than 40 individuals in the 2000s to more than 100 adult leopards today.

This latest Red List assessment highlights that the status, threat and level of protection of leopards in different regions vary widely – no blanket statement can be made, and tailored conservation plans are needed to ensure their survival. The greatest threats to leopards are habitat and prey loss, and conflict with humans. As the human population continues to grow, so do farms, crop fields, towns and roads – further fragmenting leopard habitats and isolating populations.

Leopards are known as the ultimate survivors, but they may not be able to survive the overwhelming human onslaught… A lot more attention and conservation resources will be needed in coming years to prevent these spotted cats from disappearing altogether.

– Jeannie Hayward

See issue #185 for more info about the leopards of the world. – Ed.

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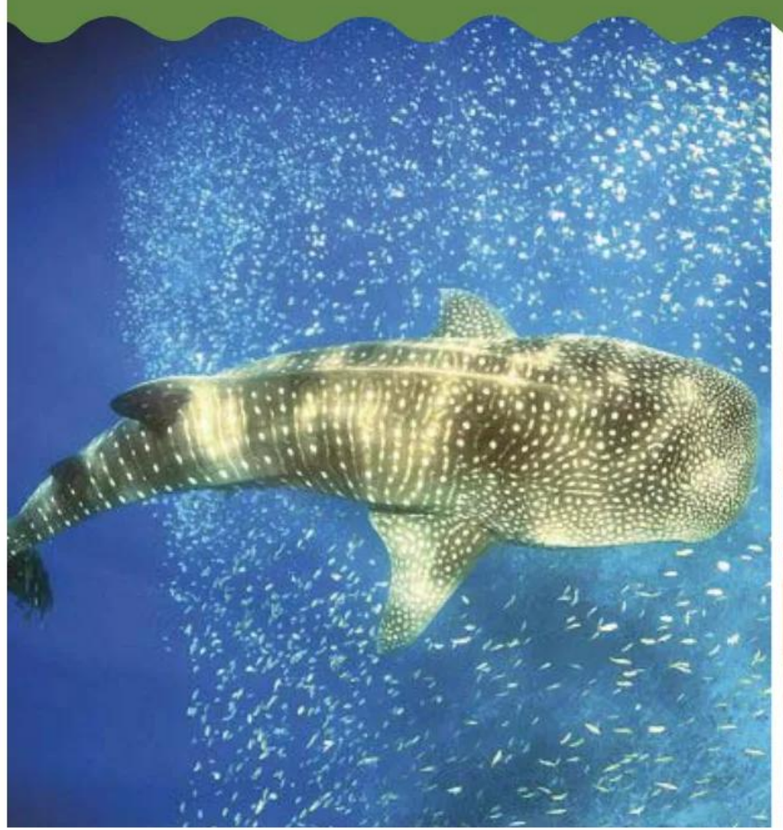
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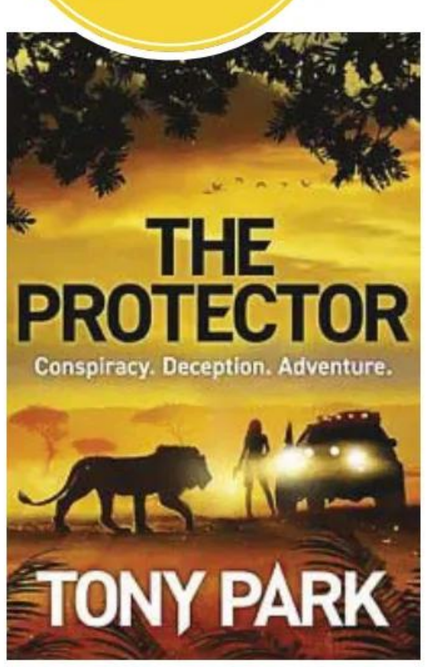






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COMPILED BY **MARTINETTE LOUW**



The Protector

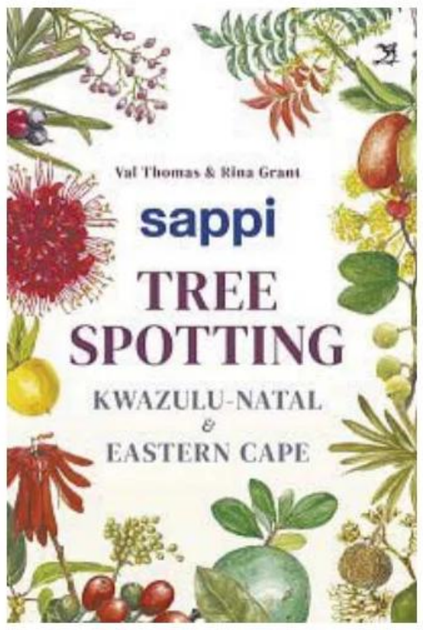
by Tony Park, Pan Macmillan South Africa
R280 in bookstores

Professor Denise "Doc" Rado is a prominent pangolin expert who takes part in sting operations to save these endangered animals and arrest the poachers who export them for their scales and meat. When one of her operations goes horribly wrong, people around her start being threatened as she leads a group of NGO donors and students on a tour of pangolin habitats in southern Africa…

Even if you've read Australian author Tony Park before (this is his 22nd novel set in Africa), he still manages to surprise. *The Protector* has plot twists aplenty to keep you turning the page, and it gives you a peek into the criminal underworld where poachers, tenderpreneurs and snipers all have a part to play.

Park's world feels familiar. The story take place in well-known tourist destinations like the Kruger Park, Mana Pools and Victoria Falls. Some characters from his other novels also make an appearance.

He's touched on pangolin poaching in the past, but this is his first deep-dive into the subject. If you're in the mood for adventure and suspense and you want to learn a bit more about wildlife conservation as you go, *The Protector* is a fun read to pack for the beach this summer.



Sappi Tree Spotting: KwaZulu-Natal & Eastern Cape

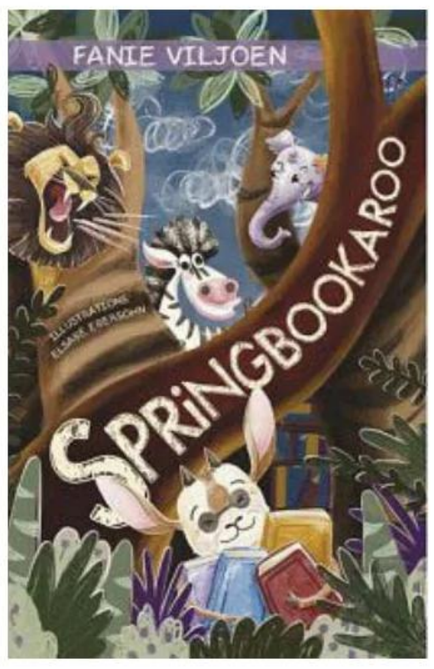
by Val Thomas & Rina Grant, Jacana Media
R350 in bookstores

The original Sappi Tree Spotting series, featuring the indigenous trees of South Africa, appeared about 30 years ago. Jacana Media is busy dusting off these popular guides. The series covers the whole of South Africa, divided into regions like the Lowveld, Highlands, Bushveld and Cape.

The *KwaZulu-Natal & Eastern Cape* guide is now in its third edition and fresh off the press. Revisions incorporate the latest research and changes to the scientific and common names of trees.

One of the main aims of the guide is to make tree identification as easy as possible. This is achieved by clever categorisation: by distinctive features (like leaves, flowers, fruit and bark); unique growth forms (trees immediately recognisable by their unusual appearance); seasonal features (like striking flowers or fruit); and ecozone and habitat. It takes some time to figure out exactly how the guide is put together, but once you've got it, finding the tree you're looking for should be a breeze.

Each entry gives a rundown of how the tree looks (accompanied by photographs or illustrations), where it grows and how it's used by humans and animals. If the tree is easily confused with other species, the "Look-alike Trees" section will direct you to those entries.



Springbookaroo

by Fanie Viljoen, LAPA Publishers
R160 in bookstores

Not all little springboks want to wear a green-and-gold rugby jersey one day. Some prefer to read rather than scrum! Springbookaroo is one such *bokkie* – he likes to spend hours next to his tree bookshelf in the veld, where he enjoys tales about warthog fairies, crow kings and skunk mermaids. He wants to share this world of wonders with his friends, but Elumpy the elephant, Coolio the giraffe and Zula the zebra turn their noses up at the idea. To them, there's nothing more fun than playing in the mud.

That's until an angry lion shows up and rips Springbookaroo's beloved book collection to shreds! Together, the friends try to save Springbookaroo's treasures and they think up a brilliant plan to teach the lion a lesson.

Author Fanie Viljoen had a great time playing with words when he wrote this bedtime read: Words are printed in different colours and fonts to make reading aloud easy (for mom and dad) and fun (for the kids). There are jokes to make the little ones giggle and the illustrations by Elsabé Ebersöhn require a keen eye to appreciate all the detail and humour.



ROAD MUSIC

Cabo Tormentoso

by Jeremiah Brimstone Band
$7 at bandcamp.com; also available on streaming platforms

If you drew overlapping circles signifying the genres of country, rock and folk, this album would sit in the shaded part in the middle. It has something of everything. Jeremiah Brimstone Band hails from the Boland. It's Elmi Badenhorst on accordion, Natalie Mason on viola, Hendré Retief on drums, Heine du Toit on bass guitar (among others) and Dawid de Villiers on vocals and guitar.

Dawid writes the beautiful lyrics; every song is like a short story. The title track, which refers to the Portuguese name for the Cape of Storms, describes the daring journey of seafarers around the southern tip of Africa.

You can shuffle around the campfire with one hand in your jeans pocket and the other around a lukewarm beer to the tune of "Gone to Ground"; "Lament of a Frequent Flyer" makes a passenger plane sound like a bar full of troublemakers; and "Katabasis Now!" is pure Tom Waits: "Now that everyone's a winner, there's just no place for a sinner…"

It's music for weekend cowboys. Turn up the volume when you have to change a tyre somewhere next to a gravel road.

– Toast Coetzer

MEET THE AUTHOR

Simon C Green

As far as architectural landmarks in South Africa go, you don't get much more iconic than the Anglo-Boer War blockhouse. In his latest book on the subject, this former British Army officer uncovers the history behind these military structures and highlights some to visit on your next road trip.



SIMON C GREEN

***Anglo-Boer War Blockhouses – A Field Guide* is part of a broader research project on South Africa's blockhouses. Why are you interested in them?** I first became aware of blockhouses when I read an article about the Jan Smuts commando – when the Boer forces trekked into the British Cape Colony during the latter phase of the Anglo-Boer War. Their route passed the Laingsburg blockhouse on the N1 and a picture of the structure caught my eye. This led to wanting to discover everything I could about these unique buildings.

What role did blockhouses play during the Anglo-Boer War? They were strong, fortified masonry buildings used by the British to protect infrastructure, like road and railway bridges, along the route from Cape Town to the Three Sisters area. Later in the war, much smaller prefabricated zinc blockhouses were set up to protect the entire rail network, which was important to British supply lines. Almost every one of these temporary blockhouses has been destroyed.

How did you do your research? Thankfully, many records have been digitised and there are lots of interest groups on social media. Initially, these digital resources provided a wealth of information. I also did a two-week trip to the UK to visit all the key archives and museums. I started the process in 2009 so it's been a *long* journey! I also road-tripped to most of the blockhouses remaining in South Africa and took photos for the guide.

What's the most surprising thing you discovered about this period of South Africa's history? It seems undervalued in the long chronology of South Africa's historical events – a real shame because the battlefields, memorials and blockhouses can all be made into tourism assets to create jobs and generate income.

The guide features more than a hundred blockhouses. Do you have a favourite? I think it's the one at Norvalspont in the Northern Cape. An engineer on the Gariep Dam project bought the dilapidated blockhouse in the 1960s and turned it into a family home. It's not open to the public – sadly – but I was lucky enough to be invited for a guided tour and afternoon tea.

One of the reasons I wrote the book was to make sites like this more accessible, even if only in print.

What was the biggest challenge you encountered while writing this book? Finding a publisher! Not one publisher in South Africa or the UK wanted to take the risk because they deemed the topic "too niche". Four years later, I've self-published two books on the subject that have sold well over a thousand copies worldwide.

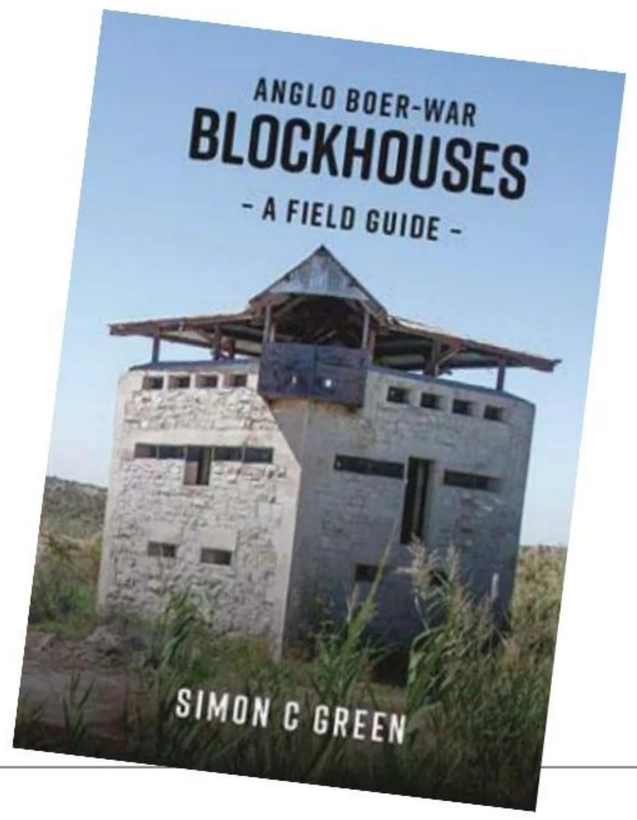
Tell us something we didn't know about blockhouses. There were mobile blockhouses… The British made small versions from steel sheets and placed them on ox-wagons. They were very heavy and pulled by a team of 16 oxen. They were often used to protect the soldiers who were building permanent blockhouse lines. The mobile ones could be moved as the line grew longer each day.

Not many blockhouses remain standing. What can we do to help preserve them? My main purpose with this guide is to create awareness, improve foot traffic, and allow local tour guides to put South Africa's blockhouses on the tourism map. To survive, they really need a purpose – they could be turned into small museums, stopover huts on a hiking trail, even a coffee shop… The people who live close to them need to embrace them and integrate them into the local tourism scene.

This field guide is a companion to your book, *Anglo-Boer War Blockhouses – A Military Engineer's Perspective*… Yes, my first book tells the full story of how these structures came about, the history of where they were first used, and how and why the British military had to resort to building more than 9 000 of them to defeat the Boer commandos. It's the most comprehensive account written on the topic, and key to understanding how they were used in the wider context of the war.

Any other projects in the pipeline? I'm currently working on two books regarding the Frontier Wars in the Eastern Cape – one about the numerous military forts constructed and the other about the battles between the British and the Xhosa. My aim is to bring the lesser-known parts of South African history to the masses, through light-reading tour guides. That said, I always delve deep into the facts and try to give an accurate portrait of the people who took part, many of whom shaped South Africa in some way.

Anglo-Boer War Blockhouses – A Field Guide (R520) and *A Military Engineer's Perspective (R370)* are available from blockhouses.co.za. Prices exclude courier costs.



Teach a man to fish

Anyone who has tried casting a line off the beach into the surf will know that this kind of fishing takes more than patience – it takes expert knowledge and the right equipment. If you're keen but you're not sure where to start, book a session with expert angler **Wikus van der Merwe**.

BY NICK DALL

It's 7 am on a very wet Wednesday in June, and there's a never-ending stream of headlights coming towards me. While the rest of Cape Town steels itself for another damp day in the office or at school, I'm driving in the opposite direction towards Strandfontein Pavilion, in the belly of False Bay.

I've booked a five-hour guided angling session with Wikus van der Merwe, owner of MMM Cape Town Fishing Adventures and author of an extremely detailed book about how to catch our national fish, the galjoen. I'm a lifelong trout and bass fisherman and I've tried my hand at rock and surf angling about 40 times; I've even managed to catch a few edible fish, including a couple of galjoen in the winter of 2003. But all of my catches have had more to do with luck than anything else. I'm hoping that's going to change today.

Google Maps directs me past a sodden playground and across a potholed gravel embankment. I park next to Wikus's Nissan Navara and trudge across the beach to the small rocky outcrop where he and his partner in crime Jannie van Blerk have set up their rods. Erastus Coetzee, a retired businessman from Melkbosstrand who is the other client on today's session, is sipping coffee under a red Drimac.

When winter cold fronts lash False Bay,
the galjoen come out to feed.



To catch galjoen, you need to get your bait to where the fish are feeding. This means you have to get wet.

A BAY FOR ALL SEASONS

Despite human activity along almost its entire length, False Bay is still home to a surprising array of fish species.

Galjoen are endemic to the cold-water coastlines of South Africa and Namibia. As our national fish, they enjoy strong protection. During the off season (15 October to end of February) they can't be killed under any circumstances; for the rest of the year you can only keep fish that are 35 cm or longer. Their fatty flesh is a bit of an acquired taste: You'll either love it or hate it.

In winter, Wikus primarily targets galjoen in False Bay, although the same tactics also see him hook a few white stumpnose, blacktail and zebra (or *wildeperd*). The other species he goes for in winter is white steenbras, although this fish requires different methods, locations and conditions.

In summer, False Bay is all about fishing for kob, which can reach weights of up to 50 kg and just happen to taste great on the braai (especially the smaller ones). Fishing for kob is completely different to fishing for galjoen, and they're often easiest to catch at night. Other summer targets in False Bay include shad (or *elf*), "flat fish" (a catch-all term for various rays and skates) and – for bragging rights only – bronze whaler sharks.

Wikus informs me that, despite already catching one small galjoen, we'll all be moving a few hundred metres down the beach. "The tide's not quite right for this spot," he explains. "The holes are closed."

We park the cars next to a flock of seagulls and Wikus wades into the breakers to cast Erastus's line. Right on cue, the sun comes out. Before Wikus has even made it back to the beach a fish hits the bait and is "*vas*". He hands the rod to Erastus, who brings in a barrel-chested 41 cm beauty. It's not just his first galjoen, it's the first ocean fish he's ever caught, despite years of trying. And he'll be braaiing it for dinner tonight.

Now it's my turn. Once again, Wikus wades into the icy ocean. He casts my bait onto a bank of black mussels, which he knows lies beneath. This time he does make it back to dry land, but only just. Within seconds of placing the rod in its stainless-steel stand, it bends double. Wikus gives it to me calmly and I begin to reel the fish in. It's fantastic to feel something strong on the end of my line again. But elation soon gives way to disappointment as the line goes heavy and still. "I think he's off," I say.

"No, he's just swum into a hole," Wikus says. "Give the rod to me, I'll get him out."

A few seconds later he passes it back to me and I reel in a 37 cm galjoen, the biggest I've ever caught. He asks me if I want to take it home for the pot but – looking into its big grey eyes – I decide it deserves to swim another day.

Here, Jannie takes over, using a needle-like implement to insert a numbered nylon tag just below the dorsal fin. He carefully records the fish's vital statistics – species, length, date and location of capture – before putting it into a bucket of saltwater to recuperate. All of this info will be sent to the Oceanographic Research Institute. If the fish is caught again, they'll be able to use the data to learn more about movement patterns; growth and mortality rates; and population dynamics.

Doing my bit for data science is great, but right now there are fish to be caught! I ask Wikus if he *has* to do everything for me. "Of course not," he says, explaining that every client's needs are different. "But if you want to do it, you'll have to get wet."

First up he teaches me how to put red bait on a hook. This is something I've done hundreds of times but, it turns out,



Having spent years analysing tides, bait, feeding patterns and weather, Wikus van der Merwe has turned galjoen fishing in False Bay into a science.

I was doing it all wrong. The trick is to have a long piece of bait tied tightly above the hook and only a tiny morsel hanging below the hook. "The fish are *skelm*," Wikus says with a laugh. "They'll strip your hook if you give them a chance."

Next is a casting lesson. Technology has come a long way since I last fished in the sea; most guys now use coffee-grinder reels with braided line. Braid takes up less space on the reel and is easier to cast – but it's also viciously sharp under tension. That's why modern rods come equipped with a so-called "bionic finger": a little metal contraption that holds – and then releases – the line during the casting motion. If this sounds complicated, it's actually pretty simple in practice – and it's a whole lot better than slicing your finger open. "I've seen cuts that go all the way to the bone," confirms Wikus.

After learning that I've also been casting wrong all my life – it's more of a flick than a hurl – I take off my gumboots and rain jacket and wade into the sea. When I'm about waist deep I cast my bait as far as I can. My first attempt is dismal, but after reeling the line back in and reloading the bionic finger, I make a pretty good go of it second time around. Back on the beach, Wikus shows me how to drag the line until the sinker is lodged in the reef. "You want it to get stuck," he says. "If it's not stuck you're not going to catch any gallies."

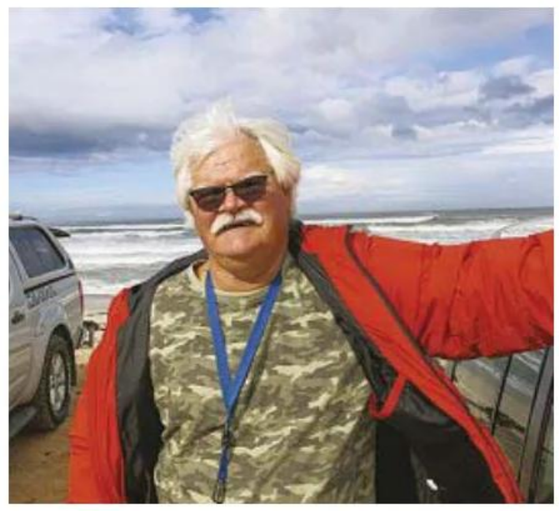
While he's explaining all this, my rod is yanked almost out of my hands. Muscle memory kicks in and – before Wikus can tell me not to – I strike back. While this may have worked in the old days, modern "circle hooks" are designed to set themselves. In yanking the rod, I have inadvertently pulled the hook out of the fish's mouth.

Over the next few hours, I hone my skills: learning to bait a hook with white mussel, drastically improving my casting distance, and attempting to exercise patience whenever a fish bites. I also stave off hypothermia by eating a few cheese scones, baked by Erastus's wife. (Next time I'll wear my surfing wetsuit.)

In the end, I didn't catch any fish without assistance. But as a group, we caught 10 galjoen, nine of which were tagged and released. I also learnt skills that I'll be able apply on future trips.

As I drive back towards Muizenberg, my car heater on full bore, I'm already plotting my next trip with Wikus. If anyone can teach a man to fish, it's him.

IN OTHER WORDS

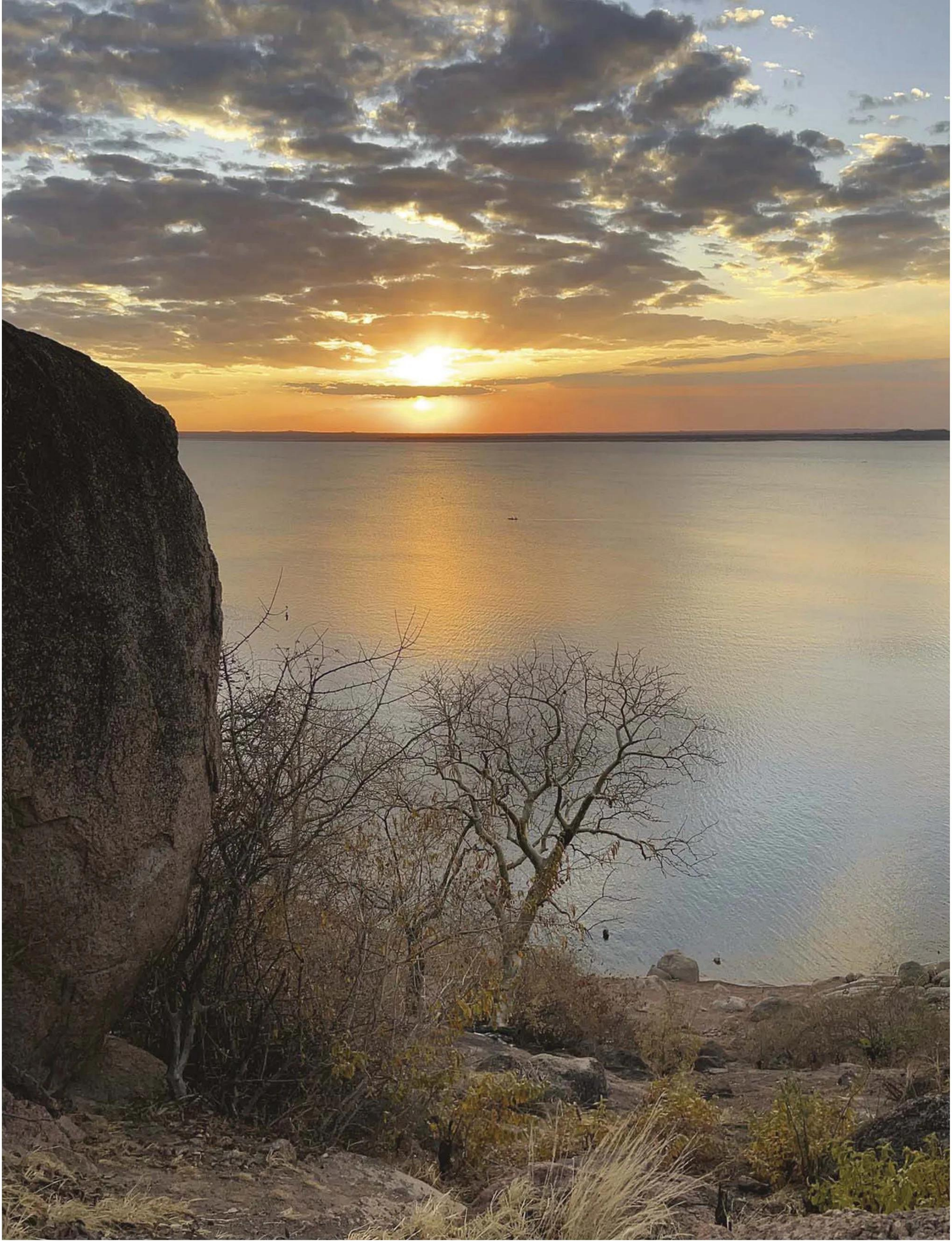


Erastus Coetzee,
retired, Melkbosstrand
"I've been fishing with many guides and I've always come back empty-handed. These guys are different: They really know their stuff and they're also incredibly nice to be around. Before today, I had never caught a sea fish. Now I've caught four. I'll definitely be going again."

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- A five-hour session with Wikus costs R950 per person. He tells you where and when to meet and provides all equipment – you just need to bring food and drink. Anyone is welcome, from beginners to experienced anglers.
- He also runs about 8 – 10 trips a year to a private stretch of coastline near Still Bay with incredible fishing. This two-night trip (Friday to Sunday), which includes food and accommodation, will set you back about R3 500 per person. Intermediate and advanced fishermen only.
- Wikus's book *The Galjoen: Legend of the Ocean* contains everything you need to know about catching South Africa's national fish. It's available in most Cape tackle shops, or order it direct for R300 including postage. (Contact details below.)
- If Wikus isn't available as a guide, he recommends Dewald Campher from African Fishing Adventures in Cape Town (africanfishingadventures.co.za) or Shawn "Ninja" Mey from Go Fish in Mossel Bay (gofishtours.com). Both guides also offer tours elsewhere in Africa.
- The Post Office fishing permits have been replaced by an online version. Create an account and get your permit at fishing.dffe.gov.za

More info: MMM Cape Town Fishing Adventures 083 791 5339
mmmcapetownfishingadventures.com



Mind the hippos

Done Zimbabwe? Know Botswana backwards? Then maybe you're ready for Zambia… On this adventurous road trip through three national parks, **Lucille Botha** and her friends camped wild, wrestled with tigerfish and criss-crossed the country without seeing a familiar number plate.

PICTURES **LUCILLE BOTHA**

Of all the sundowner spots in Zambia, Chibila Camp's view over Itezhi-Tezhi Dam is arguably the most stunning.

Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Crawshay's zebra is a unique subspecies native to South Luangwa National Park. They have narrower stripes than other plains zebra. The park lives up to its reputation for leopards. This was one of three Lucille saw on an afternoon drive. A yellow-billed stork shows off her breeding colours: pink legs and feathers, in South Luangwa's Nsefu sector. This young lion didn't seem pleased with the presence of visitors. He probably wanted some peace to eat the zebra the pride had caught earlier that morning.

The sun has slipped away and it's getting dark. The guides nod to each other and the Land Cruisers lurch forward. South Luangwa is known for its leopards, but the guides tell us we only have a 50/50 chance of seeing one on our night drive.

As quickly as they drive off, they hit the brakes. I turn my head and look straight into a pair of yellow eyes. They don't belong to a leopard, though. It's a young lion and it's so close that its stinky breath makes the kids wrinkle up their noses.

A metre or two further, the rest of the lion family is feasting on a zebra. We watch as they tear into their prey until the guides indicate that it's time to move on – the lions don't appreciate having an audience.

We still haven't seen a leopard yet, but our visit to Zambia has only just begun. On the map, the country looks like a butterfly – over the next three weeks it will unfurl its colourful wings for us.

SOUTH LUANGWA

Cats by the dozen

With our tents pitched at Croc Valley Camp on the banks of the Luangwa River, and our first campfire lit, the difficult 10-hour journey from Lusaka was soon forgotten. We scanned the opposite bank with a spotlight: Crocodile eyes floated on the water like fireflies.

It was amazing to finally be here. Zambia had been on our radar for a few years, but our children were either still too young for such a long trip (and all the malaria meds) or we didn't have enough leave days. We'd been chatting about a potential trip with our friends the Redelinghuyses from Wolseley and the Naudés from De Doorns, and when the youngest child in the group was almost three years old, we decided that we were ready for the adventure. There were eight kids in total in our group, aged two to twelve.

Suné Redelinghuys and I flew to Lusaka from Cape Town with our boys, while my husband Kobie Lochner and Suné's husband Jan-Pieter drove the vehicles (a VW Amarok and 4x4 VW Transporter Kombi) up through Namibia. The Naudés also flew to Lusaka and hired a camper from Frank Louw at Kakuli (✆ 00 26 96 778 9906).

Our plan was to loop out from Lusaka to Livingstone and Vic Falls and Zambia's other national parks, returning via the capital each time. It did mean that there was a lot of driving. In four weeks, including our return leg through Botswana, we covered about 9 500 km.

The hippos were nurking and it was time for us to say goodnight, too. We slept soundly and the next morning – like most mornings in Zambia – we woke to the call of the country's national bird, the African fish-eagle.

Croc Valley Camp is a four-minute drive from the main entrance to South Luangwa National Park at Mfuwe Bridge. The park is huge – more than 9 000 km² – and after the lion feast we saw on the night drive, we had high hopes for daytime drama, too.

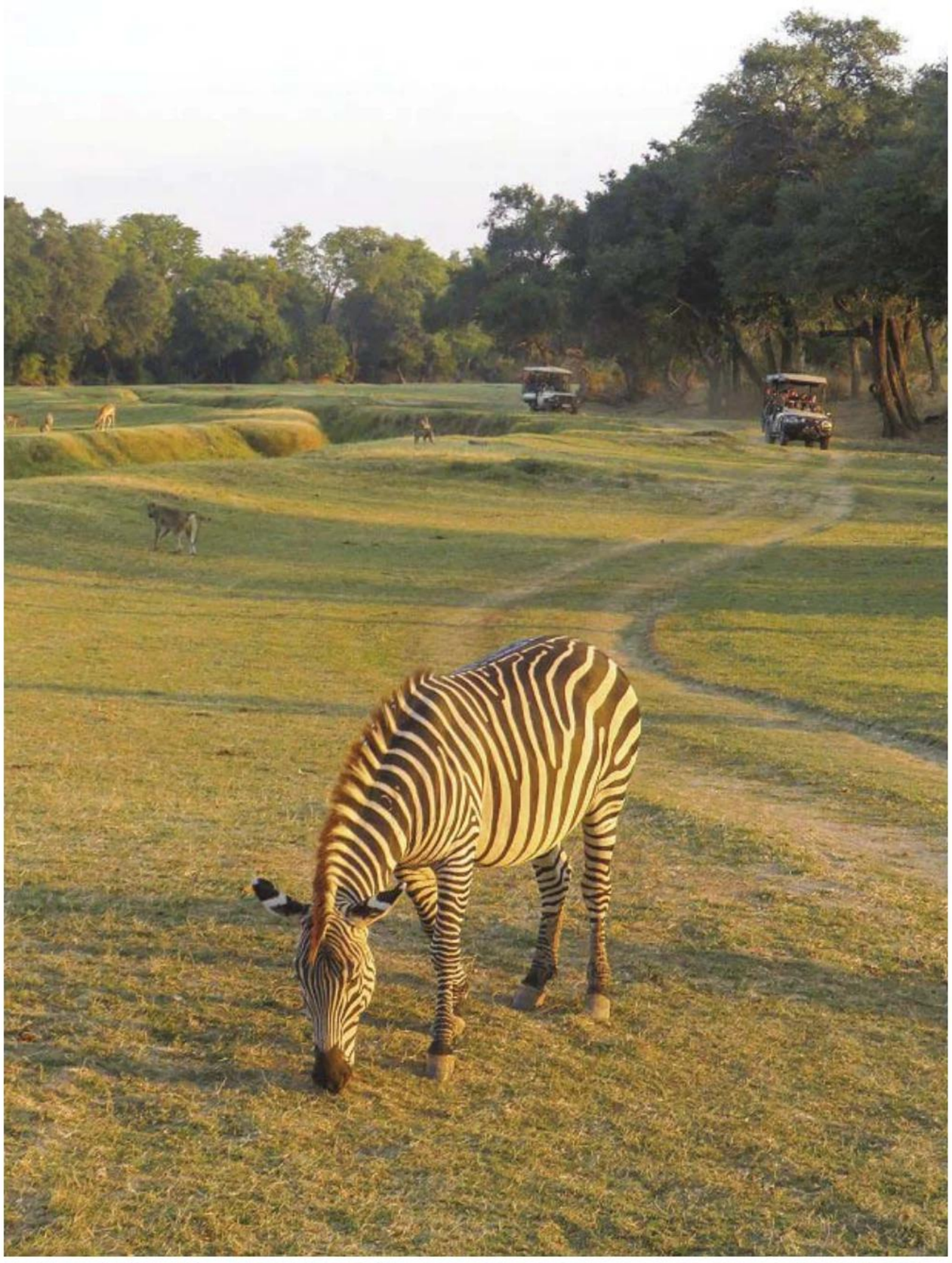
Not many people drive around South Luangwa on their own. It's a remote wilderness: Most tourists fly to Mfuwe and go on guided drives. But if you're in a suitable vehicle, it's exhilarating to venture into the ebony forests and try your luck without a guide. The park has an abundance of game. You'll almost certainly see "exotic" species like puku, Cookson's wildebeest and Thornicroft's giraffe (smaller than the giraffes we have in South Africa, without patches below the knees).

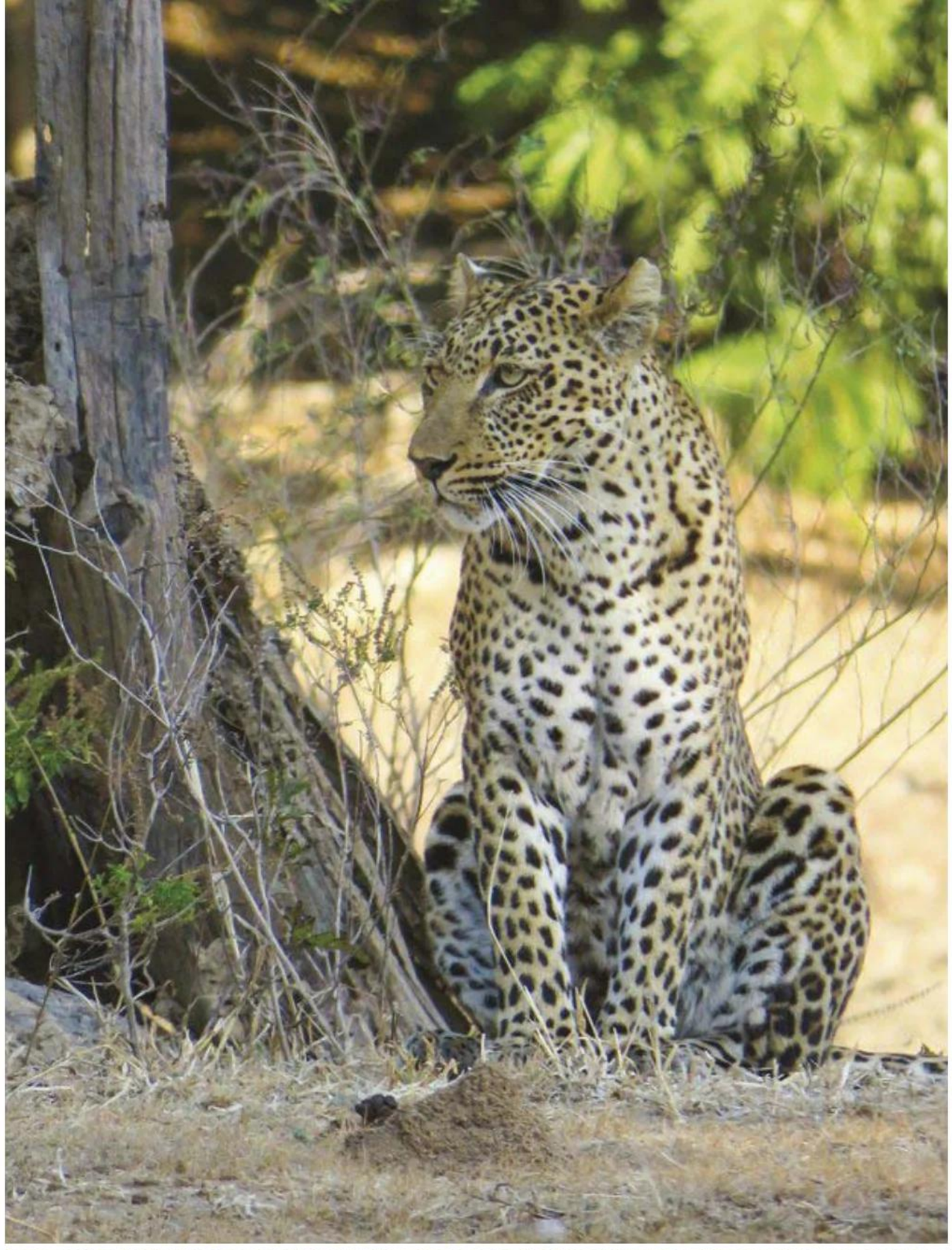
One afternoon, we were a stone's throw from the park gate when the passengers of a game-viewing vehicle next to the road pointed into a thicket. A leopard had just walked that way! We grabbed our binoculars, but the bush was too thick to see anything. After a while we gave up and drove further, only for the leopard to appear around the corner. It sat in a sunny spot and gave us a lofty look.

Irritated by the spectators and their long lenses, the leopard bounded into a tree – to the great distress of the vervet monkeys in its branches. No peace to be found there either! The leopard jumped down, threaded its way through the vehicles and disappeared into the bush on the opposite side of the road. It was the first of three leopards we saw that afternoon...

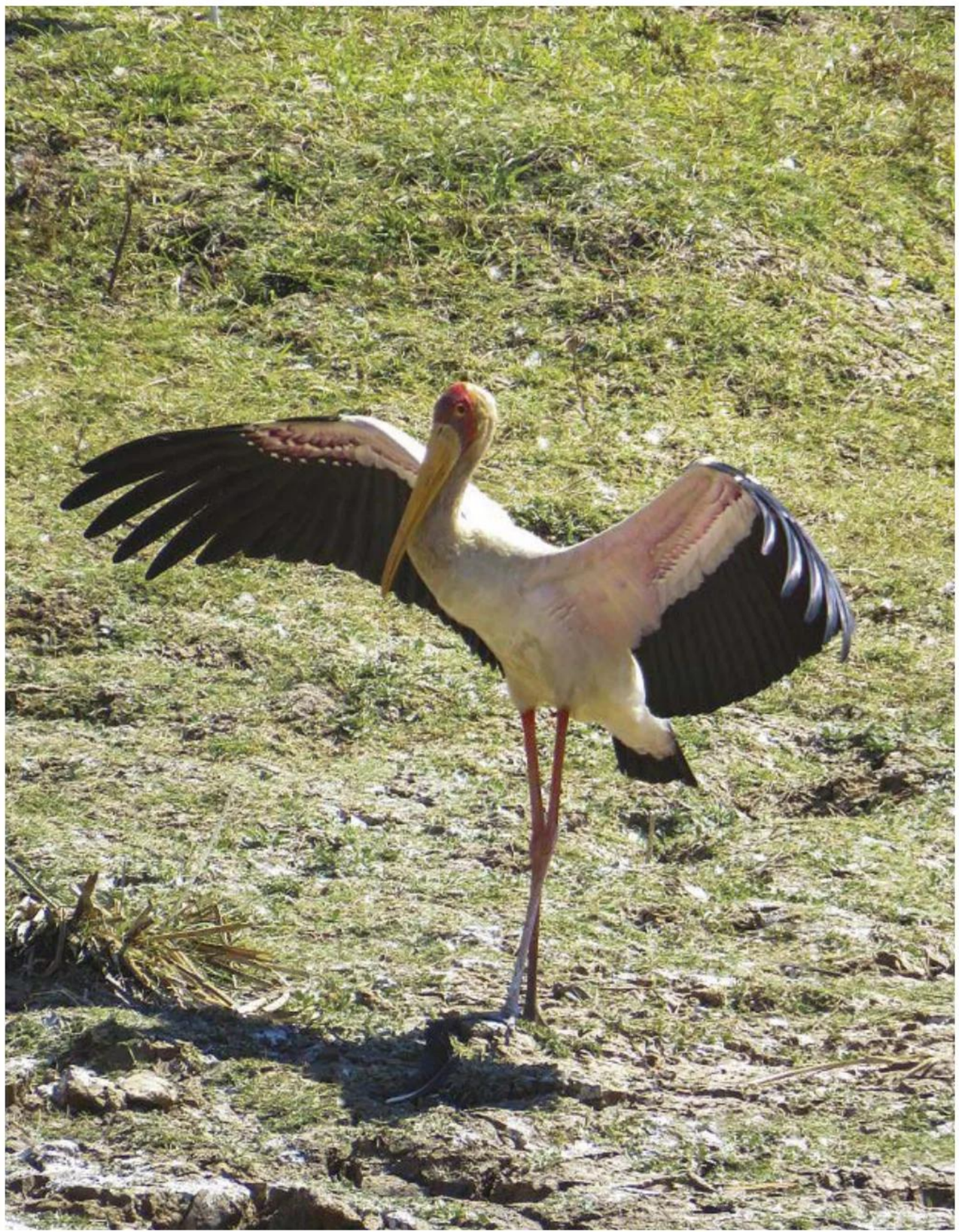
Except for a wildlife film crew doing their thing, we basically had the Nsefu sector – a pristine part of the park east of the Luangwa River – to ourselves. We watched a pride of lionesses trying to steer their playful cubs away from the vehicles and a gaggle of grey crowned cranes accompanied us over a plain to the Chichele hot spring. The hot water dams up there and attracts lots of birds.

Ever wondered where storks have their









Opposite page, clockwise from top left: The trees in Lower Zambezi National Park teem with birdsong. Stop in the shade and wind down the windows to listen to the sounds. According to John Nariti, the friendly manager at Mvuu Lodge, the dry season between April and October is the best time to visit the area. The vegetation is less dense, which makes game-spotting easier. You're almost guaranteed to see elephants crossing the Zambezi River or swimming between Zambia and Zimbabwe. Petrus Redelinghuys (7) from Wolseley pulled out a 5,5 kg tigerfish.

babies? In the Nsefu sector! There's an annual spectacle here when hundreds – maybe thousands – of yellow-billed storks gather in one of the Luangwa's channels to breed. The breeding season was over when we visited (*It starts in mid-April and Lucille visited in June. – Ed.*) and most of the chicks had already spread their wings, but it was still interesting to see the adults feeding their young. The noise when a mother arrived at the nest with a bill full of fish sounded similar to what we experience at home when we serve dinner!

Opportunistic marabous hung around to scavenge fish among the chicks while pukus grazed nearby, unfazed by the chaos.

The food chain kicks into high gear around June, when the water levels have dropped and baboons and crocodiles can reach the bird colony. Leopard spoor in the jeep track suggested that one of these big cats might have been trying to catch a baboon having a nap after his own feast...

LOWER ZAMBEZI

Hook a tiger

The next day we departed for Lower Zambezi National Park. There's a "shortcut" from Petauke to the park via the town of Chongwe, known as the Escarpment Road, but this road has a reputation for damaging vehicles, so we took the long detour via Lusaka instead. It's a mammoth 900 km drive that took us two days. We did the 10-hour slog back to Lusaka, where we spent the night at Pioneer Camp. The next day was an easier four-hour drive.

The bustle of the city was overwhelming and we were relieved to get onto the T2, which led through the towns of Kafue and Chirundu towards the park. Mango and banana plantations grew along the Zambezi River and there were lots of big houses on the riverbanks, in sharp contrast to the subsistence farmers' huts built with home-made bricks and reeds.

Children played next to the road with a car made from a plastic bottle while elephants grazed a few metres away. It seemed like human and animal lived together in relative harmony under the ancient baobabs of the Chiawa game management area.

At Mvuu Lodge, the manager John Nariti welcomed us with a big smile and an outstretched hand. We were on two stands next to the river – Elly and Mvuu. They had big trees for shade and each had a private bathroom. The Zambezi River was in front of us, with Zimbabwe's famous Mana Pools on the opposite bank.

We had a mission here, and that was to catch tigerfish!

"The water is cold at the moment, so the fish might not bite," said guide Anderson Katema the next morning. Indeed, there was a cold wind riffling the water, which didn't bode well. But I know fishermen... After exaggeration, their next most potent superpower is optimism!

Several freshwater species like vundu catfish and yellow-belly bream occur in the Zambezi, but the tigerfish is king – and a lot of fun to catch.

Anderson has been a guide for most of his life, like his father before him, and he pulled out all the tricks to help us catch a tiger. He caught some smaller fish using a home-made rod to use as chasers, and later he tried a piece of liver and even fillets from another resident aquatic creature called a bulldog fish. We got a few nibbles, but no bites.

Game came down to the riverbank while we fished. A herd of elephants swam across from Zimbabwe to feed on reeds on an island. Hippos stumbled to their feet when they saw the boat and trundled into the water. We heard water thick-knees calling while hunting for crabs and frogs. Black-winged stilts, grey-headed kingfishers and African fish-eagles were common sights. In the golden hour before sunset, we even saw lions and their cubs lazing on the sandy riverbank.

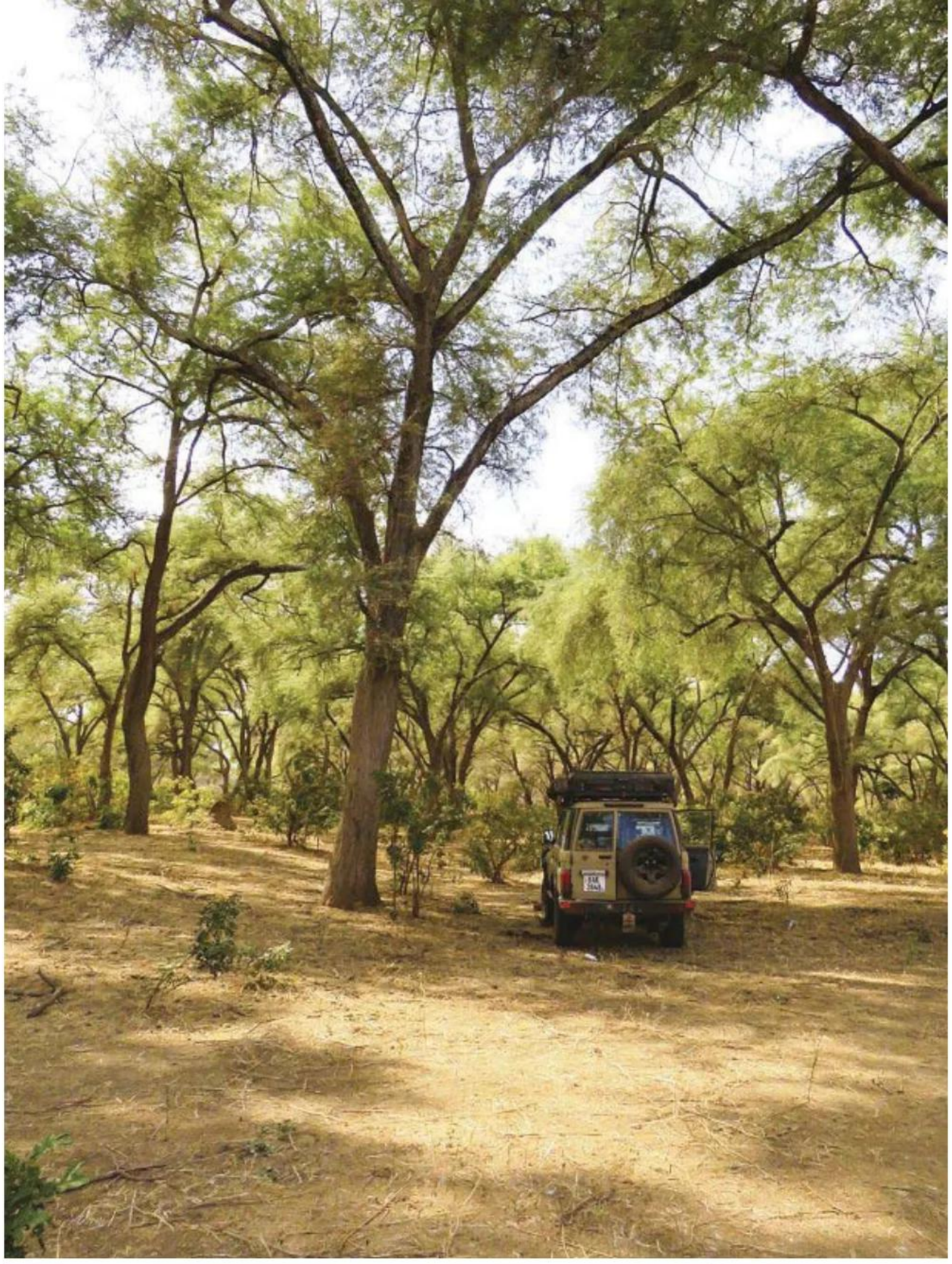
Later, only the kids were still fishing; the rest of us had given up.

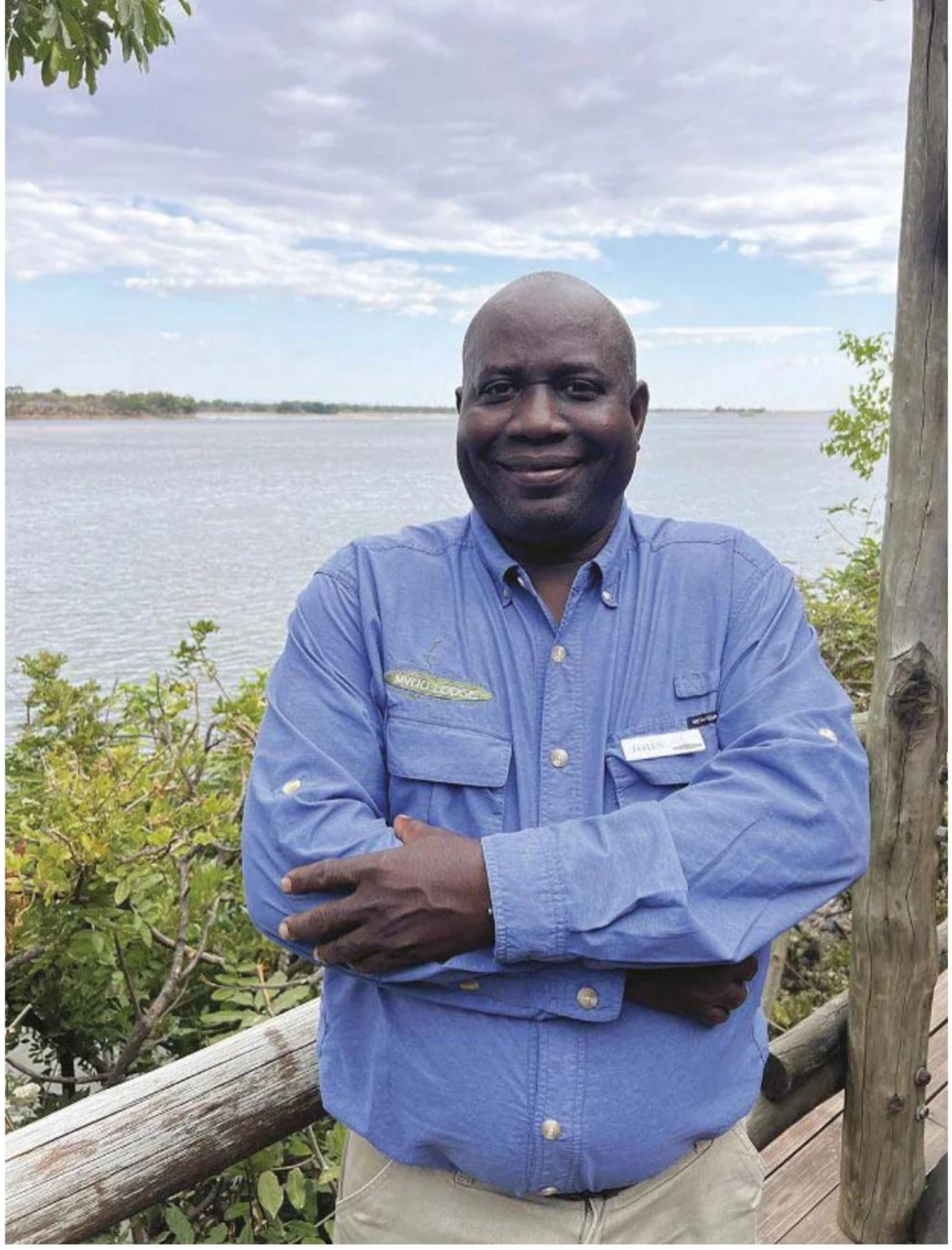
Zzzzz! A line sang. Our friends' son, Petrus Redelinghuys (7), hung on tight and steadied himself so as not to end up in the river. He was dragged from the prow to the stern as he tried to bring in the tiger.

Another guide, Emisson Nyamuda, held Petrus around the waist to anchor him. The fish leapt from the water and for a moment everyone held their breath.

The tiger put up a proper fight, but with Emisson's calm guidance and expert net skills, Petrus walked away victorious. The fish weighed in at 5,5 kg!

Lower Zambezi's Chongwe gate is about 18 km from Mvuu Lodge. It's also close to the Jeki Airstrip, for guests flying in, and a place called Hippo City where huge pods of hippo congregate. In the park, you'll often see herds of buffalo moving through the grassland.









Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Brad Keast, owner of Chibila Camp, knows how to make visitors feel at home. The number of hippos and crocs in the Zambezi will make your head spin. The rainbows cast by Victoria Falls never ceases to amaze. Jan-Pieter Redelinghuys (4) and Johannes Lochner (5) play hide-and-seek among the granite boulders at Chibila.

Elephants are everywhere – you have to make sure you don't get between a mother and her calf. Back at Mvuu, we watched funny-looking crested guineafowl scratching among the leaf litter.

Oh, did I mention the camps aren't fenced?

One evening, on my way from the campsite to the lodge, I got a big fright when the heavy silhouette of a hippo suddenly appeared from a ditch.

"Oh, I don't like that one!" John the manager said when I told him about the visitor. He shouted an insult and asked a guard to accompany me back to camp.

KAFUE NATIONAL PARK

An unexpected visitor

After four days in Lower Zambezi and surrounds, we returned to Lusaka and carried on to Kafue National Park, the oldest and biggest park in Zambia. It was another long drive of about 460 km, which took us nine hours. Our end destination was Roy's Camp, near the Kafue Hook Bridge over the river.

Evans Kahilu, the camp manager, noticed our disappointment when we arrived. Instead of the forested oasis we were hoping for, we arrived at a dull, dreary campsite on the banks of the Kafue River.

"Elephants loved the trees that used to grow here – camel's foot trees. We had to replace them with trees that they won't eat," he explained, pointing to numerous saplings that will one day provide nice shade. The view of the river and the papyrus-mat bathrooms lifted our spirits a little.

Kafue National Park was established in the 1920s and it's enormous. At about 22 400 km², it's one of the biggest parks on the continent – even bigger than the Kruger. Unfortunately, poaching is rife and uncontrolled fires have occurred here annually for decades, leaving devastation in their wake. We drove through the Lufupa gate towards Busanga Plains, but a fire had ravaged the area six weeks previously and we saw nothing but scorched earth.

Many of Zambia's parks are surrounded by so-called "game management" areas, where communities and animals live side by side. There are no fences between the parks and these areas.

Roy's Camp is in the Mumbwa game management area. One night around the campfire, we realised exactly how freely the animals roam... Fortunately the kids were already in bed when we heard a branch snap. It was an old elephant bull, moving outside the light of our fire. He sniffed the air with his trunk, looking for seedpods from the last remaining camel's foot tree, which our tent was pitched under...

With my heart in my throat, I watched the elephant taste some leftover short-rib curry at the sink before pushing over the rubbish bin and lifting the lid to investigate. A low-hanging branch blocked his path and he thankfully disappeared into the night.

Because Kafue is so big and has a limited road network, we didn't see much game the next day when we drove south to Chibila Camp, about 170 km away on the shores of the Itezhi-Tezhi Dam. We did see two special birds, though: the rare Ross's turaco and the bright green Schalow's turaco.

The dam is about 350 km² in size and was completed in 1977 as a part of the Itezhi-Tezhi Hydro Power Project. Nothing could've prepared us for its vastness. Standing at the braai area at Chibila, all I could see was blue, blue, blue. With the granite boulders in the foreground, it felt like we were somewhere in the Mediterranean – maybe Greece? We watched as sunlight danced and glittered on the water.

Owners Brad and Ruth Keast hung out with us around the fire while freshwater crayfish sizzled in garlic and lemon butter. You expect to eat beef in Zambia (and you do – it's great quality and surprisingly affordable), but that crayfish was on another level. *Cherax quadricarinatus*, or tropical blue crayfish, is an invasive species originally from Australia but now found across Zambia. Apparently the first ones escaped from a fish farm and spread far and wide.

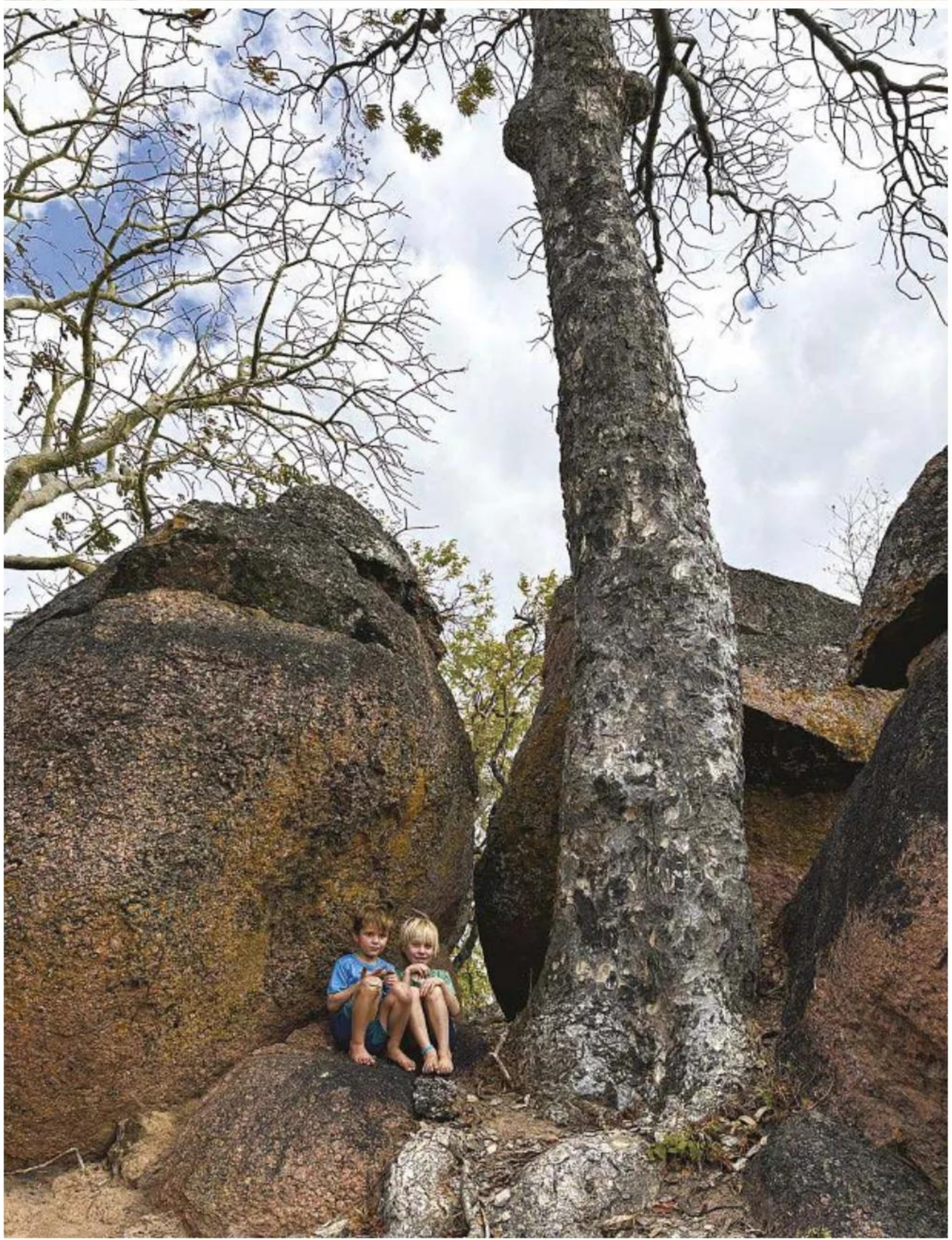
At sunset, the water and sky merged into a tapestry of fiery oranges and reds. It was time for the long trek back to Cape Town, via Victoria Falls and Botswana; back to a house with a manicured garden in a suburb with tar roads and traffic lights.

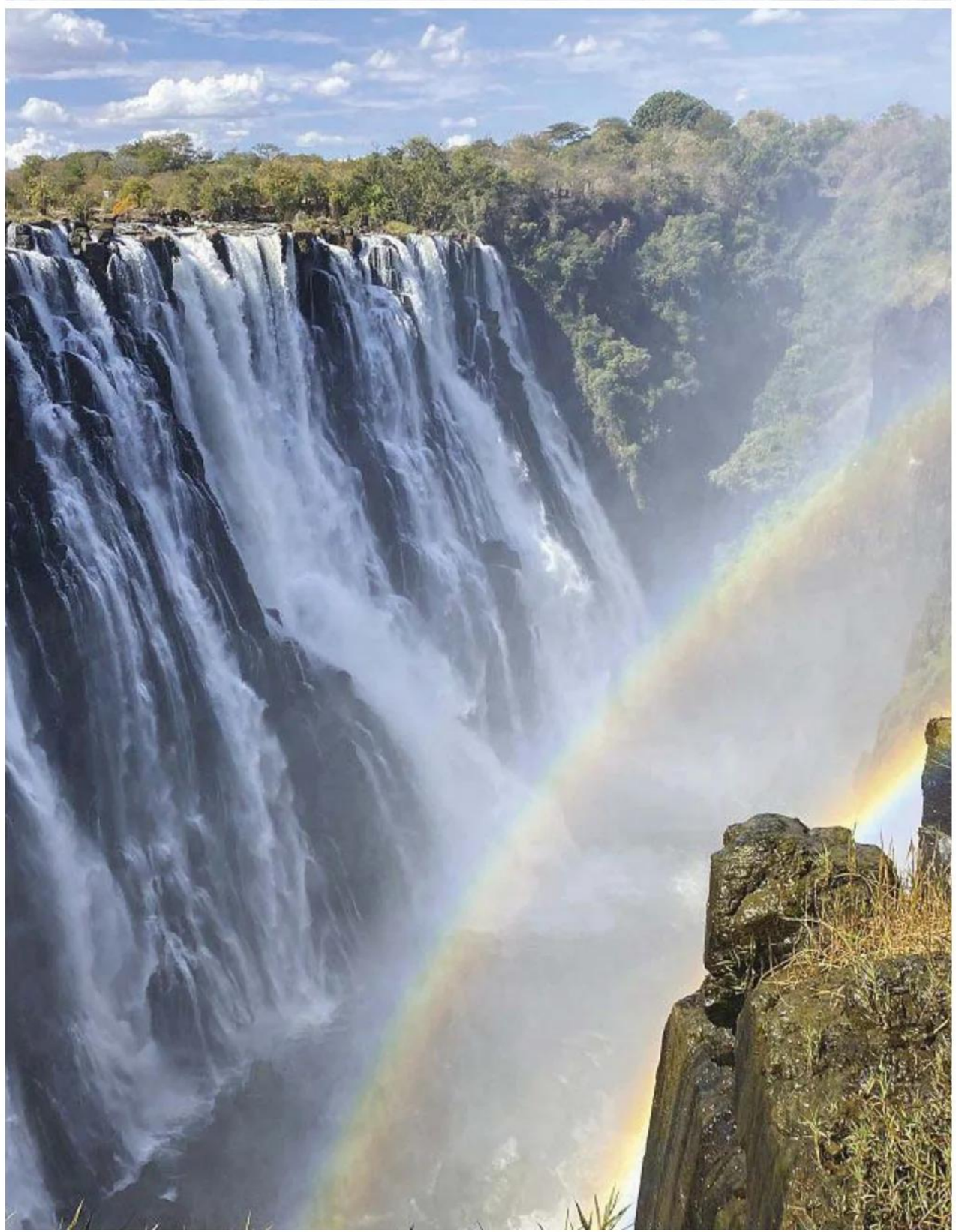
At least when I got home and locked the doors at night, I could console myself by thinking that somewhere up north, on the same wild continent, a hippo was spooking a guest walking back to their tent.

See "Behind the Scenes" on p 6 for more information about road conditions in Zambia, how and where the tour group stocked up, and what surprised Lucille most about the country.









ZAMBIA



STAY HERE

PIONEER CAMP, LUSAKA

At Pioneer Camp it feels as if you have one foot in the bush, even though you're only 14 km from Kenneth Kaunda International Airport outside Lusaka. The thatched chalets and campsite with communal bathrooms are in a garden with lots of trees and birds. There's also a swimming pool and restaurant.

Rates: Camping (with power) US$12 (R220) per person. Tents with beds and a private bathroom US$35 (R640) per person sharing. Chalet US$59 (R1 090) per person sharing (breakfast included). Self-catering cottage US$200 (R3 680) per night for up to six people, with breakfast.

✆ 00 260 966 432 700

pioneercampzambia.com

CROC VALLEY CAMP, MFUWE

Croc Valley is an institution in the area – it's an affordable place to stay on the banks of the Luangwa. (But those in the know say it's not as great as it was a few years ago…) The location is ideal, only a few minutes from the entrance gate to South Luangwa National Park. Campers can also use the deck, bar, gym (yes, you read that right!) and swimming pool. There's a low fence to keep elephants out of the water.

Rates: Camping US$15 (R275) per person (power points, communal ablutions and braai facilities). En suite eco tents US$30 (R550) per person. Room for two, three or four people with air conditioning and a communal bathroom US$30 (R550) per person. Chalet (self-catering) US$55 (R1 008) per person sharing. En suite tents (self-catering) on the riverbank US$80 (R1 470) per person sharing. There's also an option to book meals, laundry services and game drives as part of your package. Rates are lower in the "green" season (November to June).

✆ 00 260 977 175 172

crocvalley.com

MVUU LODGE, CHIRUNDU

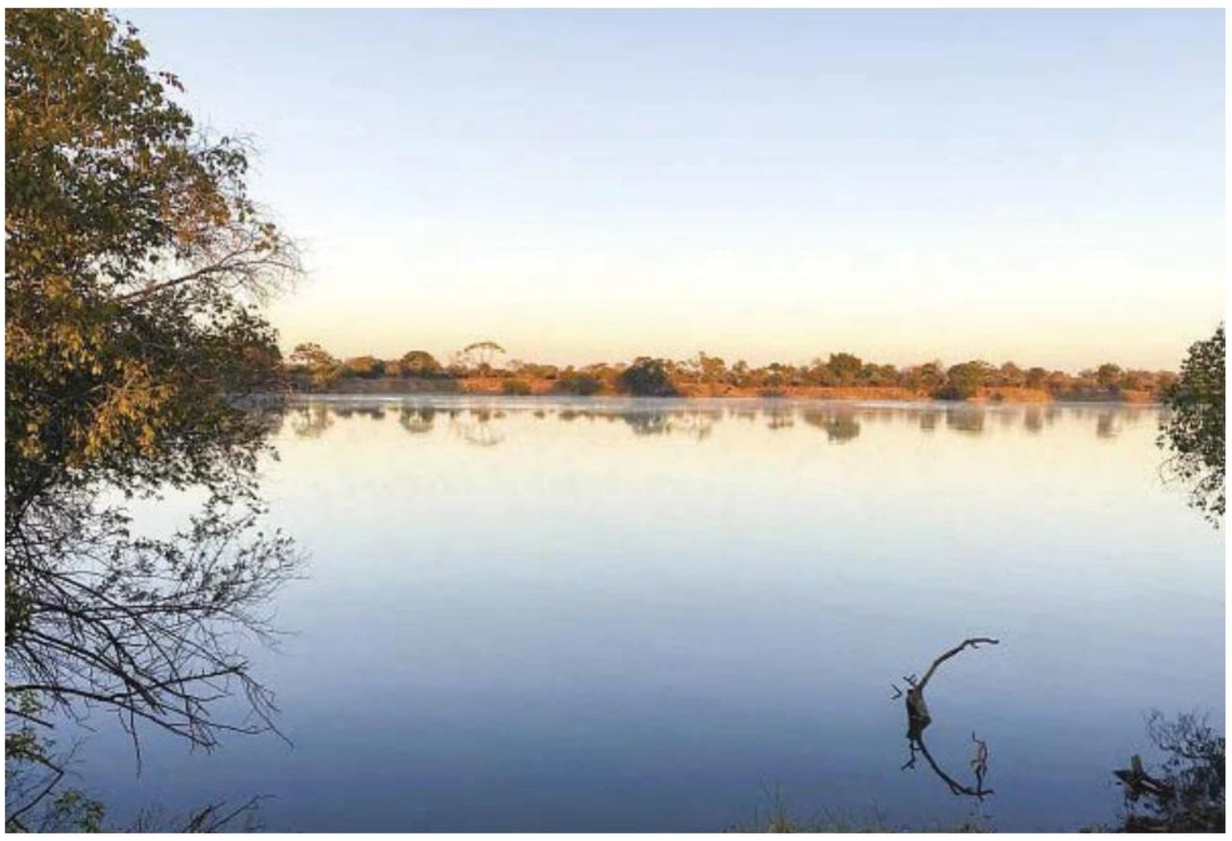
Mvuu Lodge is a good gateway to Lower Zambezi National Park. The Chongwe gate is only about 18 km away. You camp on a soft lawn under trees. The Elly and Mvuu camping stands, with lovely views of the Zambezi, are the most popular. Each of these has a private bathroom with hot water, plus a table and chairs and braai facilities. The swimming pool and deck (with soft couches) overlook the river – the perfect place to relax in the afternoon.

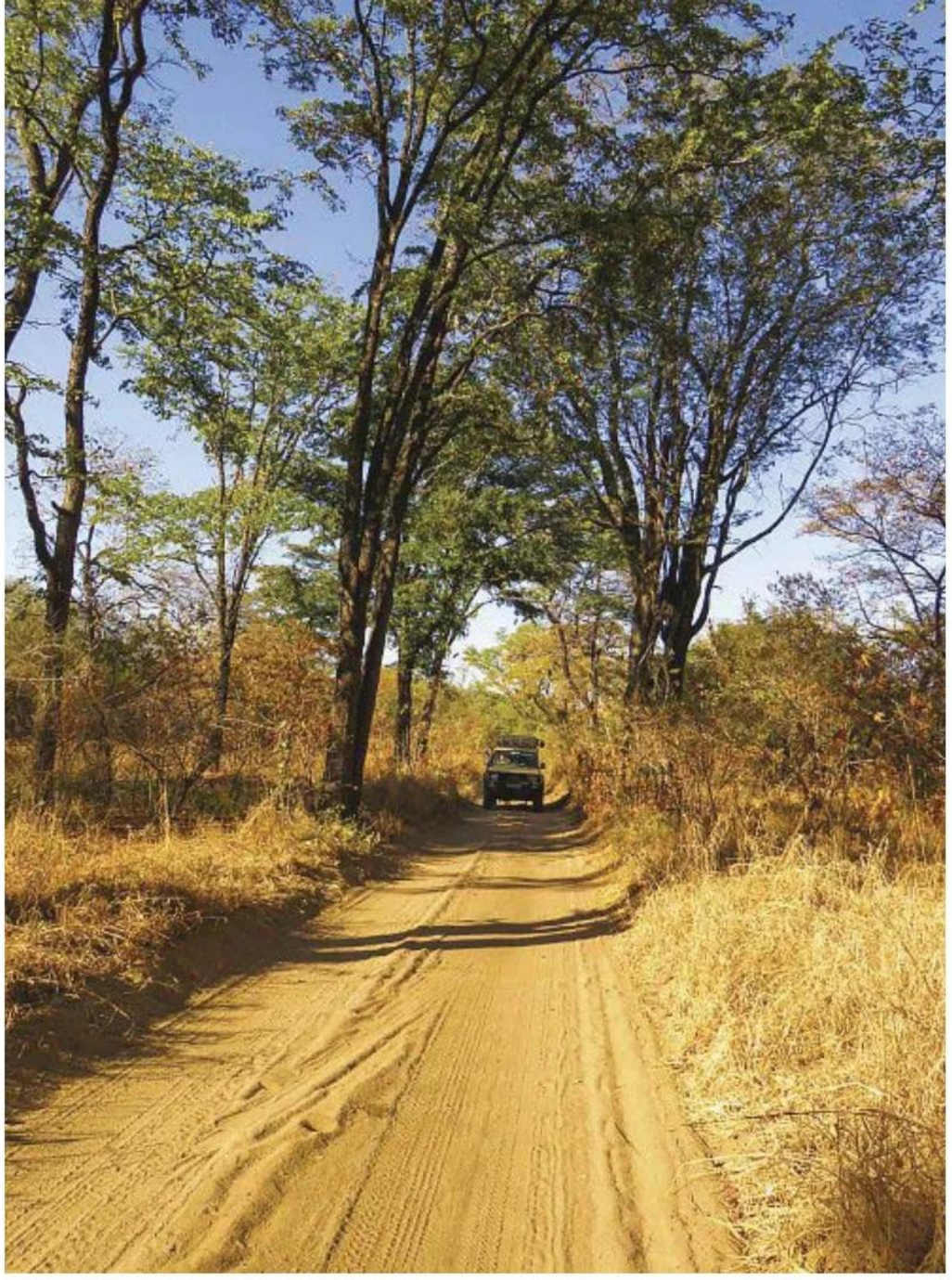
Rates: Camping stand without a river view (private bathroom) US$30 (R550) per person. Exclusive stand on the riverbank (private bathroom) US$33 (R602) per person. The campsites don't have electricity but the rest of the accommodation options have solar power. Chalets US$214 (R3 905) per person (boat cruise included). Luxury tents from US$250 (R4 560) per person (meals and a boat cruise included). Family chalets from US$330 (R6 020) per night for up to six people.

✆ 00 260 966 363 762

mvuulodge.com







Clockwise from top left: Camping at Mvuu Lodge, right on the bank of the Zambezi. The Nsefu sector in South Luangwa might be isolated, but the roads are in a good condition. Enjoy your early-morning coffee at Roy's Camp with a view of the Kafue River.

ROY'S KAFUE CAMP AND CAMPSITE, KAOMA

Roy's Camp is a great overnight stop for visitors to Kafue National Park. The camp is on the banks of the Kafue River and the sunsets are spectacular. Elephants and other wild animals often walk through camp. The ablution facilities are neat, with hot water. Each stand has a washing-up sink, but there's no power.

Rates: Camping US$12 (R220) per person. Safari tent US$35 (R640) for two people. Ablution facilities are communal and shared by all the guests.

✆ 00 260 978 649 421

"Roy's Kafue Camp and Campsite" on Facebook

CHIBILA CAMP, ITEZHI-TEZHI

At Chibila you can see some of the best sunsets in Zambia. It's located between granite boulders on the shore of the Itezhi-Tezhi Dam. The bar and restaurant have a deck where guests hang out in the evenings. The self-catering chalets also have small decks of their own. The two safari tents – with a great view from the bed! – are very popular. There's also a small lawn for campers. The tents and campsites share ablutions and a kitchen.

Rates: Camping US$15 (R275) per person. Safari tents US$35 (R640) per person sharing. Self-catering chalet US$45 (R820) per person sharing. Meals can be included at an additional fee.

✆ 00 26 977 240 113; "Chibila Camp" on Facebook

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

South Africans will pay between US$15 (R275) and US$20 (R370) per person per day to enter the national parks in Zambia. You also have to pay an extra fee for your vehicle – US$15 (R275) per day. It's often very expensive to stay inside the parks; rather find accommodation outside but close to the gate. Keep cash (preferably US dollars) on hand for park fees because there aren't card machines at the gates.

There aren't route maps available at the park gates and the staff won't be able to tell you where animals were recently seen. Download the necessary maps on your GPS or buy a guidebook beforehand. We used Tracks4Africa on our GPS and their *Zambia Self-Drive Guide* (even though it was the outdated first edition).

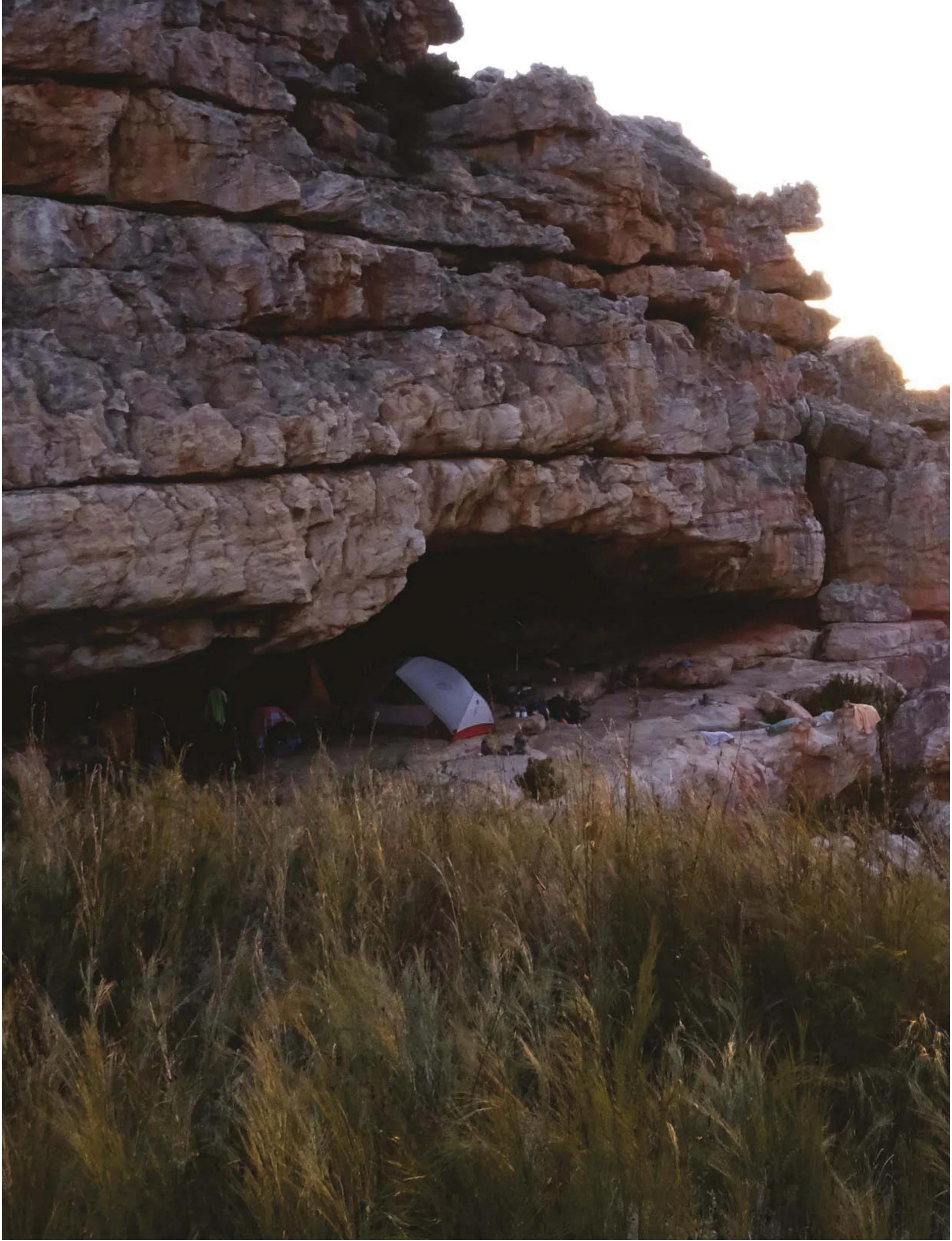
There were people to help wash dishes and carry firewood at all the camps. If you ask nicely, they'll also chase away pesky monkeys. A tip of about 100 kwacha (R70) per vehicle is sufficient.

Buy a local SIM card at one of the roadside stalls. Apparently Airtel reception is better than MTN. All the lodges had Wi-Fi (mostly free), but it didn't reach the campsites.

Keep an eye out for traffic officers around Lusaka (we didn't have problems elsewhere). They're quick to hand out fines for "traffic violations", but when you insist on a receipt they'll change their tune…

Crossing the border at Katima Mulilo was a long, frustrating experience – even though we were first in line. (Visit zambiatourism.com for the latest list of necessities and paperwork.) The road between Katima Mulilo and Livingstone is also in a poor state. We returned home via Botswana despite there being more border posts. The border crossings in Bots were quick and easy. Don't listen to the people who hang around outside the gates – you don't have to exchange currency. Except for Katima Mulilo, all the border posts accepted bank cards.

The prices in rand were correct at the time of going to print, but can change. Check before you go.



The song of the cedars

It sounds like a cliché, but the Cederberg really is a hiking paradise. Spend five days camping in the shadow of ancient trees and rock overhangs and let the wind and water erode your worries away.

WORDS & PICTURES **SOPHIA VAN TAAK**



Welbedacht Cave is not very deep, but its wide mouth makes a nice deck.

Opposite page, clockwise from the top: Engelsmanskloof is one of the most scenic climbs on the route. Don't expect much in terms of creature comforts at the old Crystal Pool Hut at the top of Klein Hartseer. You'll easily recognise Ketelberg (and its spout) – it's a prominent peak in the area. Cedar trees manage to grow between the rocks in Engelsmanskloof.

Six tired people slog up the slopes of Middelberg in October. The hike is not the cause of our exhaustion – we've only just set off from CapeNature's Algeria camp down below. No, we're all a bit frazzled because it's been a long year.

Our little group walks along in silence. My throat is still scratchy from the latest Covid variant. We're following a few dotted lines on the Slingsby hiking map of the Cederberg. If everything goes to plan, we'll cover about 45 km over the next five days, from Algeria to Sanddrif, camping wild and filling our bottles from streams.

Speaking of streams, the Cederberg had good winter rain and they're still flowing strongly. Middelberg Waterfall is cascading down.

After about 5 km of trudging uphill, we reach the Middelberg Hut. The stone building looks cosy from the outside, but inside it's a different story. There are a few of these old forestry huts in the mountains and they're not maintained. Think of them more as shelters to use in a worst-case weather scenario, when sleeping among mice on a straw-covered floor would be the least of your worries...

The hut has a great location, though, with a river pool nearby and coulter pines casting long shadows. (Their cones are as big as pineapples!) Our overnight goal is a little way further, so we walk past the hut and continue along a wide valley next to Pyramid Peak. This is also where we start to see the legendary cedars of the Cederberg.

The trees look like they understand suffering. Their bark is dull and scarred, as if licked by fire only moments ago. But they're still standing, as they've done for centuries. Each tree's trunk and branches look different, like they've been individually sculpted by a bonsai master.

The official name of this special tree is the Clanwilliam cedar: *Widdringtonia wallichii*. It only grows here, at altitudes of 800 m to 1 980 m. The trees were prolific in earlier times – there are tales of giants with trunks 11 m in circumference... Indeed, the entire mountain range was named after them. But by the late 1800s, every tree that could be reached and removed had been chopped down to make sleepers for the railway lines to the gold and diamond fields further north.

Around the 8 km mark, we settle down for lunch in the shade of some remaining cedars. It's hot. I still feel a bit feverish. Maybe we should have gone for a swim when we had the chance earlier? How far do we still want to hike today? I get no answers – my friends are clearly as decision-fatigued as I am.

It's easier going after lunch. The trail descends through Juriespkloof to Grootlandsvlakte – a plain where a single cedar stands proud like a retired Christmas tree. The map recommends you sleep underneath it – on a level stretch fittingly called "Eenboomkamp". But there's no water nearby.

On the other side of Eenboomkamp, you can turn right and take a shortcut to the Sleepad Hut, but we continue north, away from civilisation, and go up a slope called Groot Hartseer (Great Heartache).

It's a merciless climb and soon I'm out of breath. I fall behind and call out (maybe a touch melodramatically) that the rest should carry on without me. I reach a place where water seeps from the mountain and trickles across the path. I lie down with my cheek in a puddle. I feel nauseous. Am I still sick, or did the name on the map get into my head? If this hill had been called "Great Joy", I might have been at the top already. I haul myself up and carry on, leaving a little bit of my dignity next to that puddle.

I catch up with the group at a place called Crystal Pool, which is allegedly very beautiful. Today, it's not: The area around the pool is a swamp and we hop from one dry tuft of grass to the next to get to Big Boulder camp.

The ground at Big Boulder is also wet, but each tent gets a level spot as the sun sets. Dinner is gulped down without ceremony and then it's lights out. Today's 15 km leg got the better of us.

Sacred stone

Half a century ago, this rugged landscape was declared a wilderness area. I feel grateful to be here, a speck of dust in 710 km² of nature.

Earlier in the day, we went up Klein Hartseer and passed the Crystal Pool Hut. We're now climbing Sneeukop, via an impressive gap called Engelsmanskloof. Sandstone walls tower on both sides and cedars are rooted to rocks in the most impossible places. It's hard to say whether the tree is holding onto the rock or vice versa, but every tree and rock looks comfortable in each other's company.

According to legend, a Boer commando ambushed a group of British soldiers here during the Anglo-Boer War. One poor Englishman was decapitated by a cannonball

DID YOU KNOW?

The Algeria forestry station was first called Garskraal. In the early 1900s, French forestry officials who had been brought in to help develop the area renamed it Algeria because the landscape reminded them of the Atlas Mountains in North Africa. The name change was apparently done at the request of an English colonial official called George Ernst Bath, who couldn't pronounce "Garskraal"…

and since then his headless ghost has been haunting Crystal Pool. Hmmm... I might believe the ghost story if they could tell me how they got a cannon up here!

Unlike Thomas Maclear and William Mann, we won't go all the way to the top of Sneeukop. They were the first Europeans to summit the peak on 21 March 1843; Maclear put up a beacon here like he did on Table Mountain. Instead, we turn onto an overgrown jeep track called Die Trap, following a wide band of shale that runs around Sneeukop and the adjacent peaks at a height of about 1 500 m.

We quickly progress to South Peak. Around the 5 km mark, we make out the Sleepad Hut with its scenic views to the west. But we also see that a group of schoolboys has settled around the hut... No worries, the day is still young and there are other places to camp.

We hike on along Die Trap, below Langberg. In places we slip and slide through muddy streams. At Sederhoutkop (about 3,5 km beyond Sleepad) we consider the camping potential of some rock overhangs, but the tallest among us can't stand upright and there are mouse droppings galore. The last option: Walk another 2 km to Welbedacht Cave.

Welbedacht is one of *the* places in the Cederberg. If you haven't been before, you keep this fact to yourself. And if you have been, you tell everyone. But to join the conversation, you first have to find the cave!

The trail was clear and easy to follow where we turned off Die Trap into Welbedachtkloof, but now there are forks and faded shortcuts. Exiting the kloof, I'm almost sure we're lost, but then I hear a cheer from the hikers ahead.

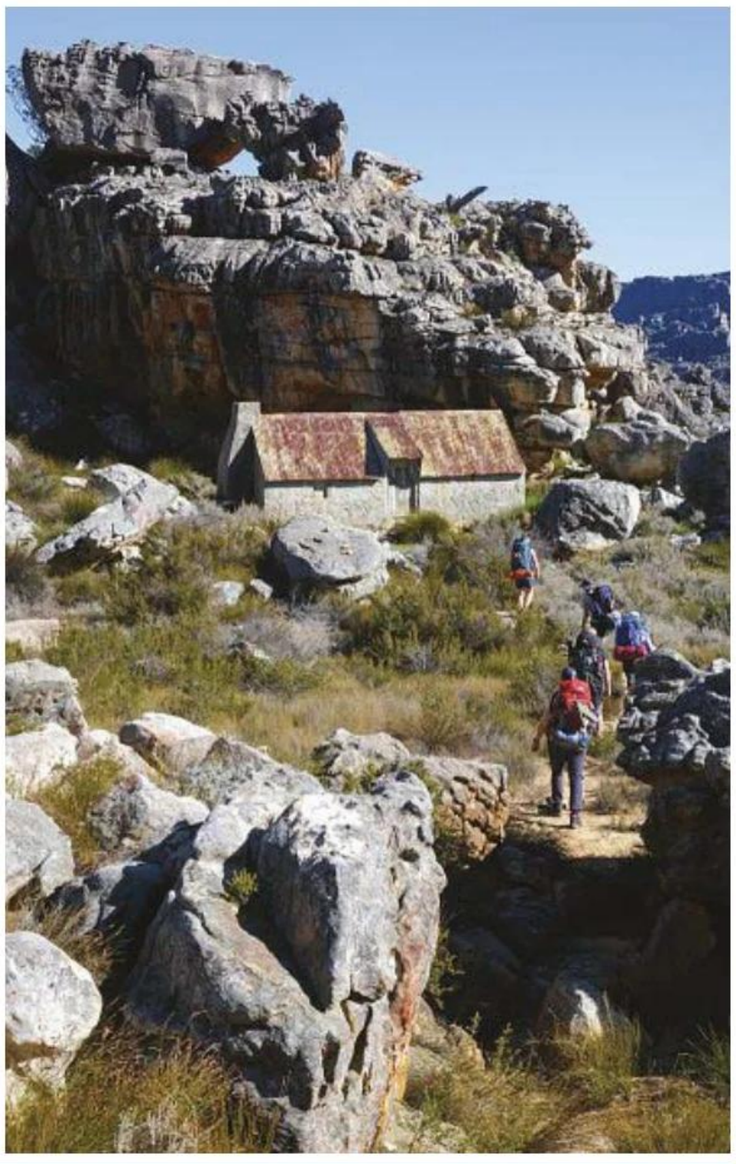
Welbedacht is an overhang with a wide mouth where you can spread out your laundry to dry in the sun. We have shelter, but we need water. Around the corner we find a small trickle where we can fill a pot – with lots of patience. But for a wash we have to walk back and climb down into Welbedachtkloof.

It's strange how you can be so attuned to the sound of running water after only two days in the mountains. You hear it long before you see it. We stumble around in the bush. It's somewhere close by. Where the murmur is loudest, I lie down on my stomach and push my tin mug through the grass as far as my arm can reach. I feel the mug get heavier and pull it out when it's full.

When the water pressure in my shower at home is a little low, it can spoil my day, but









Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Sunrise at the Welbedacht Cave. Gabriëlskloof has a few places to swim. Die Rif plantation makes for a unique dining spot. Turn here at the top of Gabriël's Pass to hike to the Wolfberg Arch. When you pitch your tent at Die Rif, mind that you don't trample a cedar sapling. Jeannie Hayward found leopard spoor!

here it's a joy to wash myself – mug by mug – in the tall grass.

Later, we look west as the last sliver of light slips away over the horizon. Snug in my sleeping bag, I think about the dances and hunts that were once recorded on these cave walls, before the art was destroyed by graffiti and campfire soot. Imagine the stories these walls have heard? How many rituals took place here? When did the last shaman lie on his back in the silence, as I am doing now?

It really is a special place. I wouldn't be surprised if we woke up as new people tomorrow morning, with hearts as big as the full moon and feet as sure as a klipspringer's.

In good company

The morning starts slowly. While our stoves hiss, we talk things over: Do we want to stick to our original plan and check out the cave in Ketelberg's spout? The climb doesn't look too difficult and we can leave our backpacks at the cave. But the outing will add 6,5 km to the day's distance. No, let's not. The unanimous decision is to just enjoy the few days we have left. No peaks will be summited today.

The cave *did* change us.

After breakfast we return to Die Trap. It's a bit monotonous to walk along the jeep track, until fellow hiker Jeannie Hayward spots something: leopard spoor.

Jeannie works for the Cape Leopard Trust and her keen eyes have been on the ground for days. She's already pointed out white leopard droppings and places where a porcupine rootled around and a dwarf mongoose slipped in the mud. We gather around the tracks to hear what she has to say.

We amble on until the path starts to descend to Groot-Hartbeeskloof. Higher up in the kloof is Gabriël's Pass, and further along is level ground where we can pitch our tents. Or we could camp somewhere around here.

What about up there, among those trees? We find the footpath to a stand of cedars near the old foundations of a farmstead called Die Rif. Many years ago, people farmed with vegetables and rye here – they even had a mill.

The Die Rif plantation is one of the more recent efforts to save the Clanwilliam cedar from extinction. There are small trees among the older ones – each is marked so you don't accidentally step on it. There's also a rain gauge with instructions for anyone who comes along to record the rainfall.

We only hiked 7,5 km today, but who's keeping score? We fill the lazy afternoon with cooking, tent-pitching, exploring, reading and napping. Throughout it all, the wind whispers in the treetops. The longer I spend in these mountains, the more beautiful the cedar's song becomes.

Right place, wrong time

There's excitement in the air – today we only have to hike 3 km to the Wolfberg Arch, another Cederberg icon.

Gabriël's Pass runs above the cedar plantation, between Corridor Peak and Wolfberg, to a small nek, before it descends the northern side of Gabriëlskloof. Apparently, the pass and kloof were named after a postman who would cross the mountain on foot along this route from Wupperthal, to get to the farms on the southern side. By now, our backpacks are lighter than his satchel must have been and since the day's leg is so short, we decide to go looking for a dot on the Slingsby map called Daniël se Swemgat (Daniël's Pool), lower down Gabriëlskloof.

We continue past the sign pointing right to the Wolfberg Arch; we'll come back this way later. Another 500-odd metres down the kloof, we arrive at a series of river pools. No idea which one is Daniël's... We choose one with a shallow end and a deep end – and a place to sit. Some members of the group slip into the cold water while the rest of us make tea.

We go back to the Wolfberg Arch sign with fresh legs and climb the last rocky slope. At the top, on the plateau, the landscape folds open and we move quickly across the plain. Suddenly the hikers in front stop dead in their tracks. There it is: an eye of stone watching us approach.

The Wolfberg Arch is an impressive sight. The closer you get, the more imposing it becomes. It's like a portal to another realm and we are pilgrims who have travelled far to step through.

Happy and with a new sparkle in our eyes, we sit under the arch and unpack lunch. The resident Cape rockjumper (with a ring on its leg) appears out of nowhere to feast on crumbs. From this high vantage, we can see all the way into the blank expanse of Grootberg and beyond.

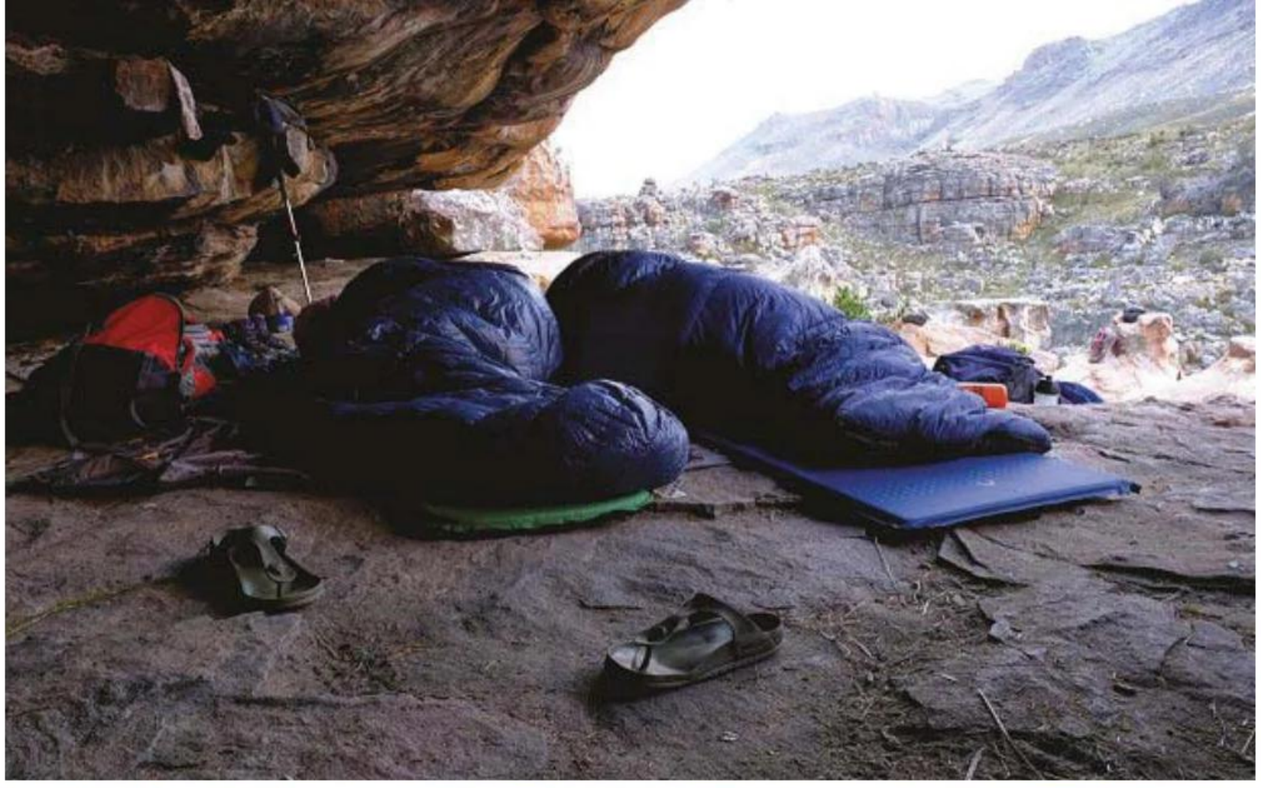
We pitch our tents and go looking for a sunny spot to nap. The arch is certainly one

CEDARS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

A part of the Cederberg was declared a state forest in 1897 and fast-growing species like blue gums were planted to prevent the last Clanwilliam cedars from being chopped down. Cedars were also planted higher up in the mountains, but this project wasn't commercially viable because the trees grow slowly. It ended by 1916.

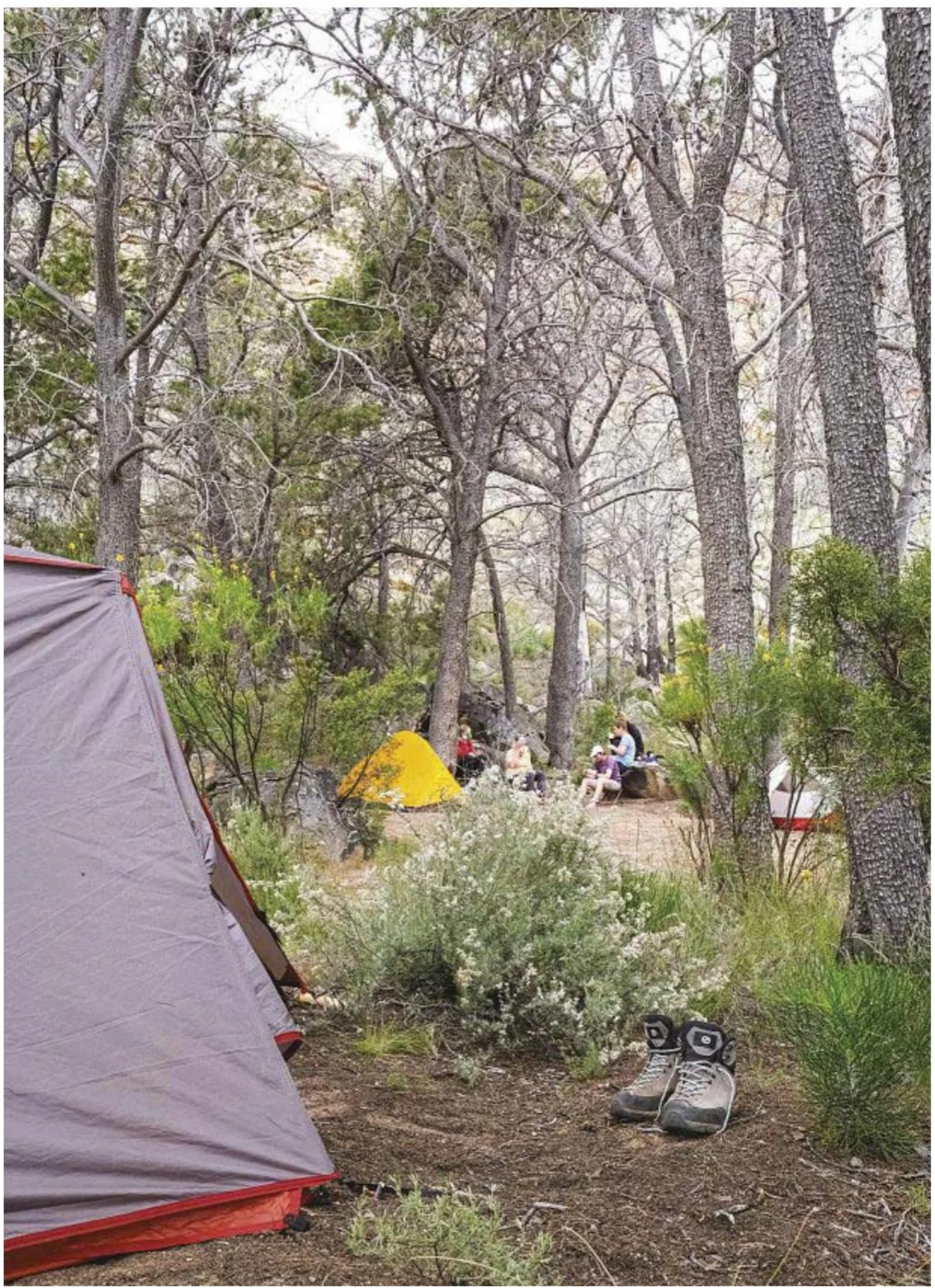
Cedar numbers are still falling even though it has been illegal to harvest them for more than a century. This is mainly due to fires and because the remaining trees are hundreds of years old and not as fertile any more.

These days, the Botanical Society of South Africa and CapeNature are working with local communities to revive the species. To spread their seed, cedars rely on mice, dassies and baboons; now humans are also helping the process. Seed banks are being built up and seedlings are cultivated in nurseries until they're big enough to be planted on rocky outcrops where fires can't reach them. **Visit sustainableceder.org to sponsor a tree.**













CEDERBERG

Spend the night under the Wolfberg Arch in an unbeatable "suite".



of the highlights on the trail, but all the other days have also had so much to offer. Our tin mugs runneth over.

But what's that? The crunch of hiking boots? Voices?

We've been away from civilisation for so long that we'd forgotten all about the school holidays. More and more hikers show up during the afternoon to camp here for the night. The tent city expands and it gets too busy for our liking, as people pose for selfies and set up tripods to take photos of the arch against the night sky. I had plans to do the same but decide against it. We eat dinner early and head to bed.

The last hurrah

It's still dark when we tiptoe past the other tents to have one last cup of coffee underneath the arch. A fog bank rolls in while we pack away our dew-covered tents. The rest of the camp is just stirring but we're already on the trail. It's an easy day – only 6 km.

We hike south across the plain. I look over my shoulder again and again – just to make sure the arch is still there. As we gain distance, it shrinks to a keyhole, and then we're swallowed by the Wolfberg Cracks.

We walk down the wider of the two cracks, aptly named Adderley Street. The narrower crack runs parallel to Adderley: Most people come up that way and down this way. The narrow crack involves some wriggling and scrambling to get through crevices and up some tight gaps. It's the more exciting option if you're hiking with a daypack, but not fun with a bulkier bag.

The hustle and bustle around the farms of Kromrivier and Dwarsrivier, where Sanddrif is situated, come into view much too soon. We scamper down the final 1,5 km to Sanddrif, past more and more hikers coming up. I can see the anticipation in their eyes and I'm happy they'll get to experience the adventure of the cracks and the arch.

But I also think to myself: If only you knew what it looks like on the other side of the arch... If you did, you'd turn around to go get your tent.

DID YOU KNOW?

Wolfberg was probably named for the shy brown hyena, which was seen here by early settlers. "Wolf" was the best descriptor the Europeans could give these hairy, prick-eared predators.



KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

How does it work? There are several hiking trails in the Cederberg Wilderness Area – you can plan your own route. You can hike anywhere as long as you inform CapeNature where you're going and for how long you'll be out. Hikers need to be self-sufficient. Use the Slingsby *Hike the Cederberg* maps (R375 at shop.tracks4africa.co.za) and forgesa.com to plan your route.

A hiking group should consist of at least three people and no more than 12. The mountain huts are basic shelters with no furniture and no facilities. The floors are soil or cement covered with a layer of straw. The huts aren't maintained. Most hikers carry tents and camp near water. There are no places with stands that can be booked beforehand.

The mountains have water in winter and spring; summer is too hot. No open fires are allowed in the wilderness area, so bring a hiking stove.

What's a classic Cederberg route to hike? The trail we hiked is a section of the unofficial "Central Circuit", which covers about 75 km. Sections of the wilderness area were still closed after fires so we couldn't hike in the region south of the Algeria dirt road.

We ended at Sanddrif, but to complete the loop you'd carry on west past the Maltese Cross and Sneeuberg, to the Sneeuberg Hut. On the last day, you'd hike north-west to where the footpath joins up with the dirt road on Uitkyk Pass; from there it's about 6 km back to Algeria. Search for "Central Cederberg Circuit" on hikingsouthafrica.co.za

Where? CapeNature's Algeria camp is about 220 km from Cape Town. Turn right off the N7 about 34 km beyond Citrusdal. Algeria is 16 km further, on the other side of Nieuwoudts Pass.

How do I book? Send an e-mail to CapeNature with your route, hiking dates, and the name, surname and ID number of every member of your group. Overnight hikers pay R170 per person per night, plus a one-off conservation fee of R70 per person. (Free with a Wild card.)
reservation.alert@capenature.co.za; capenature.co.za
087 087 8250

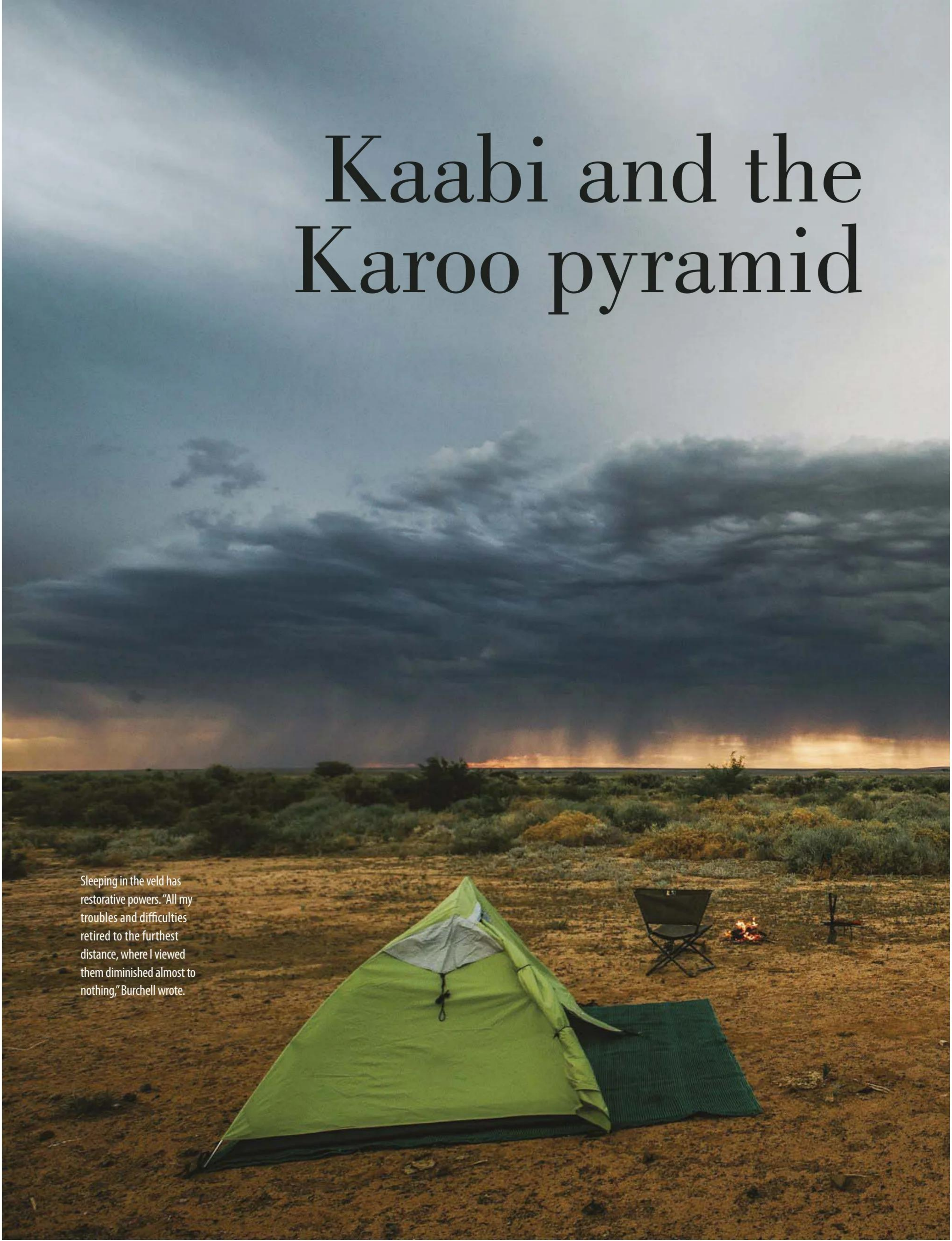
Accommodation before the hike? Algeria has comfortable self-catering cottages. The two-bedroom units have a double bed, two single beds and two sleeper couches in the living area. Rates from R1 770 per night for the first four guests, plus R290 per extra person (max six people). Camping from R220 per night for the first two people, plus R70 per extra person (max six per stand). Conservation fee R40 per person per day. (Free with a Wild card.) Hikers can leave their vehicles at Algeria.

What else? If you want to end at Sanddrif Holiday Resort as we did, park a car there beforehand. It's about 30 km back to Algeria by road – you don't want to walk that after your hike! The section on Day 5, from the Wolfberg Arch through the cracks, goes across Sanddrif property so you have to arrange for a day permit beforehand: R85 per adult; R55 per child under 13. sanddrif.com
027 482 2825

Sanddrif has a beautiful campsite (from R640 per night for four people) and self-catering cottages (from R2 160 per night for four) next to the Matjies River. Stay a few days and visit the nearby Stadsaal Caves, Truitjieskraal and Cederberg Wines. There are also great day hikes in the area.

Sources: cederbergnames.blogspot.com; sanbi.org

Kaabi and the Karoo pyramid



Sleeping in the veld has restorative powers. "All my troubles and difficulties retired to the furthest distance, where I viewed them diminished almost to nothing," Burchell wrote.

We've been following the trail of English artist and explorer William Burchell, who trekked inland from the Cape Colony more than 200 years ago. In this third instalment, we go looking for a strange rock feature along a forgotten river in the Karoo.

WORDS & PICTURES **WILLEM VAN DER BERG**

KLAARWATER (GRIEKWASTAD) TO KAABI'S KRAAL: 434 KM

BURCHELL: 11 DAYS | WILLEM: 3 DAYS

Two centuries ago, Griekwastad wasn't part of South Africa. It also wasn't known as Griekwastad – it was Klaarwater, or Karrikamma, a settlement and mission station established by a group of Basters. They called themselves Basters; the name "Griqua" only came into use later.

Klaarwater was far from the border of the Cape Colony, which at that time stretched from the Kamiesberg in Namaqualand to the Sak River near Fraserburg and then towards Graaff-Reinet. To tell the truth, there weren't many borders at all back then. When the explorer William Burchell travelled beyond the colony in 1811, he wrote: "It is difficult to define boundaries of the country inhabited by any of these wandering African nations."

In *Travels in the interior of Southern Africa (Volume 1)*, he continues: "In fact, with respect to territory, they have none of those ideas which a European would attach to the word. The soil appears never to be considered as property, nor is it hardly ever thought worth claiming or disputing the possession of: the water and pasturage of it, is all that is rated of any value."

I've been following in Burchell's footsteps all the way from the Western Cape, up the Roggeveld escarpment, through the Upper Karoo, across the Orange River, to Griekwastad, where I'm standing behind the police station in Burchell Street.

Many things have changed.

To start, we now have nine provinces and nearly every borehole and tree – indeed every scrap of land – is owned by someone. The lands of the Bushmen and the Kora, painstakingly detailed on Burchell's maps, no longer exist.

From Griekwastad, Burchell wanted to travel further north to see the regions where the "Bichuana nations" lived. But most of the people in his party refused. In 1808, two explorers known only as Dr Cowan and Captain Donovan had left on an expedition into this unknown region. The last contact from them had been on Christmas Eve two years previously.

"Since which time, no tidings whatever had been heard of them, and it was generally believed that all must have perished," Burchell wrote, outlining why so many feared travelling further north.

But he was persistent and set out to recruit more people and reinforcements for his trek company. To do so, he first had to travel back towards the Cape Colony to get in touch with the government. Graaff-Reinet was the closest option, but there was no known route to get there from Griekwastad. Missionaries also advised Burchell not to travel that way because they'd heard stories of cruel Bushmen who lived in the area, and of high, steep mountains that would block his path.

He didn't listen to any of them.

"A beneficent deity of refulgent lustre, and countenance of inexpressible benignity, advanced towards me, and whispered softly in my ear, that sweet word LIBERTY: which repeating, till it thrilled in every nerve, the celestial being seemed to say; Follow me."

Burchell and a small party departed on 24 February 1812. Two days later, they slept in a kraal owned by a man called Jan Bloem. He noted that Bloem and his people had seven reed-mat huts in a dry riverbed, a small distance from the Orange River. There was a strong natural spring nearby and the kraal wasn't too far from the settlement at Die Kloof, near modern-day Niekerkshoop.

I think I know the exact location of the kraal...

Years ago, during another trip, I was on a dirt road on the eastern side of the Asbestos Mountains, travelling towards Niekerkshoop. Something caught my eye: a white church among blackthorn trees, waiting for summer rain. I turned off and stopped next to a small house near the church. It was owned by the Beukes family; they invited me in and told me their story.

In the 1800s, Piet Beukes left Namibia to travel to South Africa. He was bitten by a spider along the way and became very ill. His family covered him in sand and left him next to the road so he could sweat out the venom. Piet prayed to God to save him. If He did, he'd build a church in his new home.

Piet Beukes lived, continued his trek and bought land between Prieska and Douglas. "He was a rich bastard," said Nico Mathane, one of Piet's descendants. "He owned thirteen farms in the end."

On the first farm, Dieprivier, Piet made good on his promise. A small community grew around the church that he built, and there was even a school in later years. During my visit, only a handful of Piet's descendants still farmed in the area; the church and school were no longer in use.

Before I left, Nico showed me a spring under thorn trees in the dry riverbed.

It had to be the same place.

Opposite page: This is the original map Burchell drew on his trek through the country. It appeared in his book, *Travels in the interior of Southern Africa (Volume 1)*.


A MAP OF THE EXTRATROPICAL PART OF SOUTHERN AFRICA,
Constructed by
WILLIAM J. BURCHELL, ESQ.R
In which his own track is laid down entirely from the geographical & astronomical observations made during these TRAVELS, & the remaining parts accommodated to it & formed mostly of new materials combined with others selected from various documents & wholly re-arranged.
SCALES
EXPLANATION of the SIGNS and ABBREVIATIONS
INTERPRETATION of DUTCH WORDS
HOTTENTOT WORDS
DAMMARA'S
GREAT NAMAQUA LAND
THE KARRIKARRI COUNTRY
THE BICHUANA NATION
MORAHRAQUES
INHABITED BY BUSHMEN OF VARIOUS TRIBES
COUNTRY OF THE KORAS
COUNTRY INHABITED BY VARIOUS TRIBES OF BUSHMEN
SOUTHERN ATLANTIC OCEAN
GREAT KARRO
PART OF CAFFRARIA OR KAFFERLAND
SOUTHERN OCEAN OR THE CAPE SEA
17 Longitude East from Greenwich



Above: Piet Beukes built this church, about 25 km east of Niekerkshoop, after he survived being bitten by a poisonous spider. Burchell spent a night in the dry riverbed nearby as a guest of Jan Bloem.

Opposite page, from the top: This T-junction is next to the river course that Burchell followed from Die Kloof settlement to the Orange River. Scattered belongings and a rusted car wreck are the only signs of the Beukes family who once lived here. Willem photographed Hennie Beukes next to this mirror in 2011. Fences and gates are relatively new in the Northern Cape. In Burchell's time, only wind and water affected the movements of gemsbok, lions, rhinos and the Bushmen.

When I arrive at Dieprivier, the house is deserted. I walk around to the front door and stop dead in my tracks. God, or someone else, has taken the Beukes family away. Items are scattered on the ground: clothes, schoolbooks, trowels, a hammer and paintbrushes, an empty purse, rusted spades... Two couches have been left to the mercy of the sun and wind. I step inside uneasily. There are photos on the floor: children dancing; a bride with a bow in her hair; serious faces in their Sunday best; a laughing baby; a woman eating an orange.

Elizabeth Beukes passed away on 20 July 2013. She was 93 years old. Her funeral notice lies among the ripped-out pages of a Bible. On one wall, there's a painting of Jesus. Three angels hold golden cups and collect the blood dripping from his hands and feet. He seems to look at the chaos around him with sadness.

Last time, I took photos of Hennie Beukes inside this house. He was a man with wonderful stories, but he harboured darkness, too. He told me then how he'd tried seven times to end his life. "There are voices in my head, but not *deurmekaar* voices," he said. "I talk to them like you'd talk to someone on a cellphone. You have to pray. Beg the man upstairs to stay with you. And ask Him to think of me, too."

Ai, Hennie, I was looking forward to talking about Burchell and Jan Bloem with you. I hope that you and your family are okay.

Jan Bloem and his people helped Burchell and his group to cross the Orange River on rafts. The ox-wagon returned to Griekwastad; Burchell continued with some oxen and a few horses. Because the route to Graaff-Reinet went through unfamiliar territory, Burchell wanted to travel light. He only carried the essentials – bedding and camping gear – and herded five sheep for meat. South of the Orange River, they came across a riverbed full of grass and pools of water. They mostly travelled along this "new and friendly river" as Burchell called it.

Today we know it as the Brak River. But alien prosopis trees have monopolised the water and taken over.

Along the way, Burchell met a Bushman captain called Kaabi – he and some of his people were on their way back to their kraal further upstream. "Kaabi pledged himself for my safety while I remained in his part of the country, and for a friendly reception at his village," Burchell wrote.

Burchell trekked with Kaabi along the Brak River, across the empty plains. They slept in the

open in a heavy thunderstorm. No rooftop tent and down sleeping bag for William Burchell, just a jacket and a blanket. And the Bushmen had even less.

I try to stay close to the river on the dirt roads between Prieska and Strydenburg. A locked gate bars my way. The day falters as I make slow progress along a narrow farm road towards the N12 between Britstown and Strydenburg. Eventually I pitch my tent in a clearing next to a sheep kraal.

At sunset, the western horizon catches fire. Rainstorms are etched against the orange glow. Then the colours are extinguished as dark clouds roll closer. The wind gallops ahead and flattens the grass.

My tent has served me well for 17 years and thousands of kilometres' worth of adventures. But now its zip is really being put to the test. The door of the flysheet rips open and the wind tries to carry it off. I scramble to save it.

Why have humans become so soft? Burchell and his people experienced much worse for months. They slept outside on the ground in the coldest and wettest conditions. I sit in a camping chair and listen to what the wind is trying to tell me about these things. Lightning flickers in the distance and eventually the silence comes. I light a fire under the Milky Way and imagine sitting next to Burchell around the flames.

"I have learned that the delightful sensation of unshackled existence could never be recalled, after I had re-entered the colonial boundary. Here the ideas of restraint began to usurp its place; and at Cape Town it became completely annihilated," he wrote.

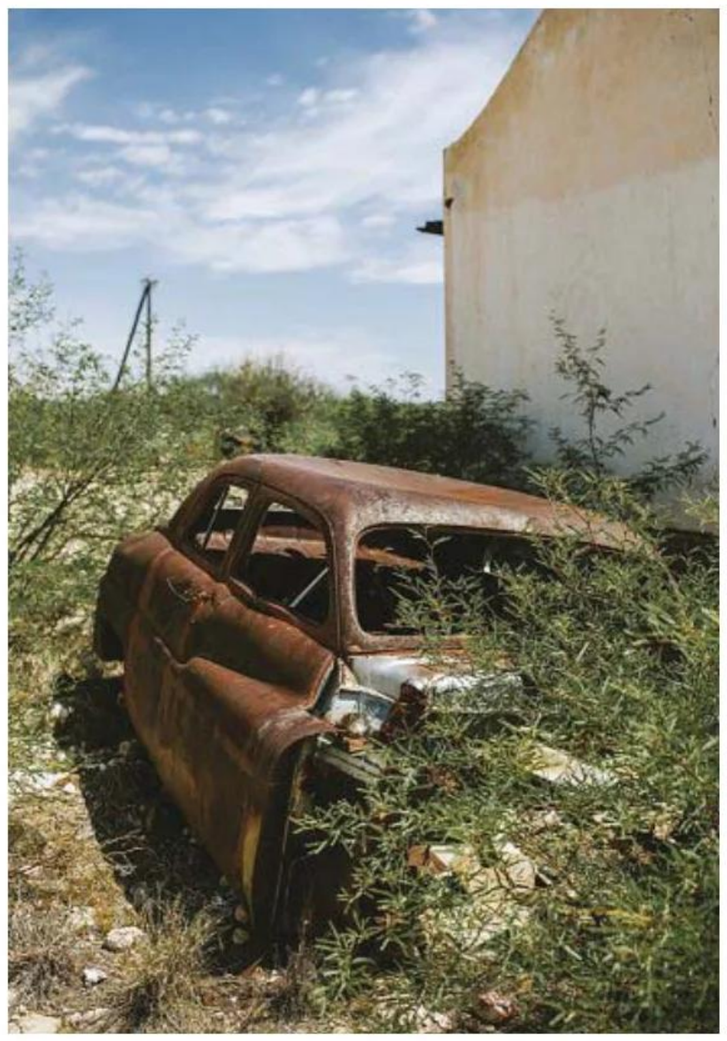
He's right. Freedom is always a privilege. Even if the wind tries to blow you away.

When rocks go missing

To accompany his detailed descriptions, Burchell also made drawings of the people and places he encountered. He wrote that Kaabi led them through a poort and into a rocky landscape called the Hiënaberg. The Brak River curled past here. On the opposite bank, at the base of a hill, he saw something spectacular: "An object which, at first sight, excited my greatest surprise, as I viewed it, for a few moments, as a work of art; and was lost in wondering what nation, able to erect such a monument, had inhabited these, now wild and deserted, regions. But though an Obelisk, it was not the work of man:











Above: Charl Botha farms along Burchell's "friendly river" now known as the Brak River.

Opposite page, from the top: On 5 March 1812, Burchell made a drawing of this stone pyramid. On 1 March 2024 it was still as impressive, even if the Brak River was blocked with invasive prosopis trees. At that time, coffee was a scarce commodity in the interior of South Africa. Burchell wrote that the people of Griekwastad roasted and ground wheat, which they mixed with their coffee to make it last longer. "But the beverage made from this mixture, though not unpleasant to the taste, had a heating quality which would not agree with every stomach."

it was planted there by the hand of Nature."

It was a stone pyramid, and he made a sketch of it.

I had studied Burchell's route description and looked at maps of the region – old and new – and I had a pretty good idea of where the pyramid might be. And if I found it, I might also find Kaabi's kraal. Burchell wrote that it was nearby, on top of a hill.

The next day, between Britstown and Strydenburg, I turn off the N12 towards the farm Barendsfontein, where owner Charl Botha tells me that he knows about the pyramid – or at least he's heard the story. Apparently a group came through here a decade ago, also retracing Burchell's journey.

"They searched down the river and we've done some more searching since then, but we've never found the pyramid. Maybe it fell over or washed away," he says with a shrug.

My heart sinks a little, but I try one last angle. I tell Charl that the pyramid might be in a place called Baverspoort, which is marked on some maps. Baverspoort is on the property, Charl tells me, but he hasn't seen anything there either... Still, it seems like my enthusiasm has got the better of him and he offers to take me there to have a look.

We drive through the veld, the same veld that Kaabi and his people called home, and where Stoffel Speelman, the best shot in Burchell's group, killed two black rhino.

"It might be the same veld but it's a different world," Charl muses. "Burchell wrote about this same river, and what did he see? Bushmen, rhino, so much game... Right here, where my sheep and cattle are grazing."

At Baverspoort, the Brak River is choked with prosopis trees. The landscape doesn't look anything like Burchell's river, which meandered through a valley of soft, green grass. The bush is so dense that we can't get to the opposite bank, where Burchell would have stood.

Is this even the right place? Charl and I climb a rocky slope to get a better view. The koppies in the background look like those in the illustration, but we can't see any stone pyramid.

"There was a bank of earth in the river there," Charl says. "The water might have



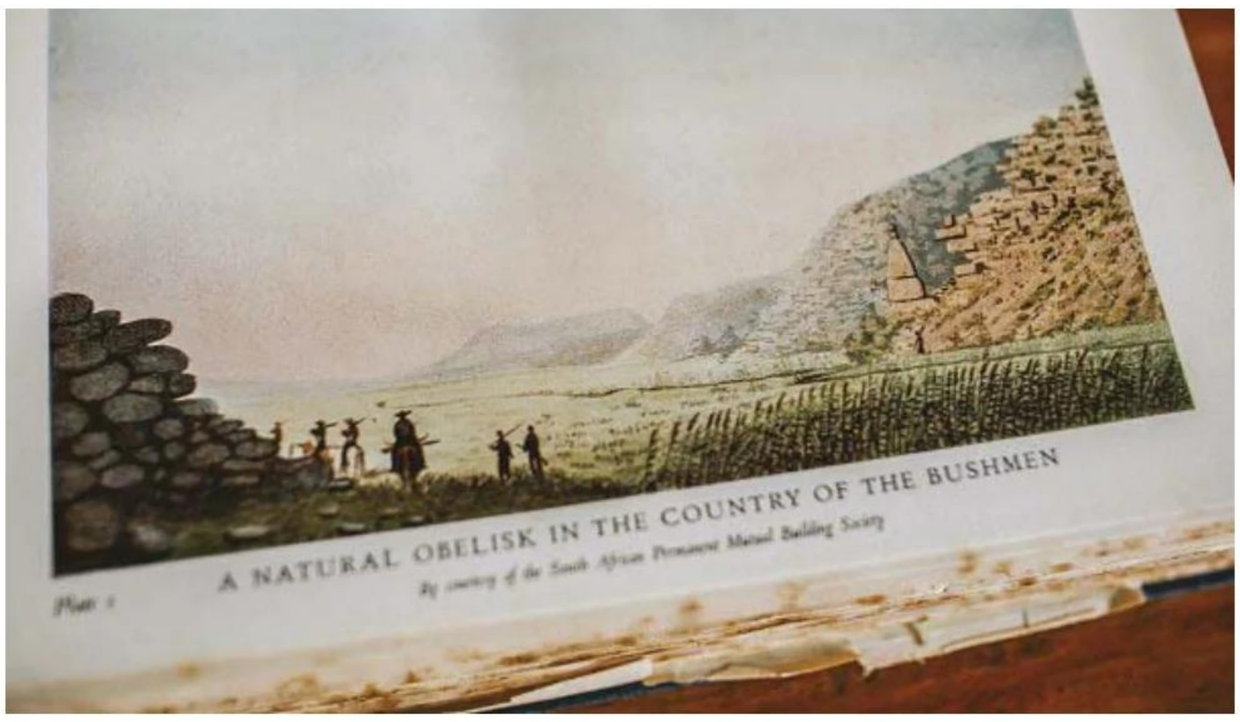
dammed up and washed the pyramid away."

I can't help but feel disheartened. It feels like Kaabi's kraal and all the other wonderful things Burchell experienced also washed away. I desperately wanted to stand where he'd stood; I wanted to hear if any echoes remained of the songs the Bushmen had sung for Burchell as night fell.

I climb down the ridge but I can't reach the river because of the bush. So, I walk along a slope, around the side of another ridge, and there it is: a 4 m rock pyramid standing tall against the blue sky. An artwork created by nature. The "Natural Obelisk in the Country of the Bushmen" from Burchell's drawing.

Charl is as excited by my discovery as I am and he gives me permission to camp right there. He also encourages me to try and find Kaabi's kraal.

There were 20 huts arranged in a circle and Burchell watched the Bushmen dance deep into the night. "Every one of the party sang, and all kept time by gently clapping hands. The words made use of were simply *Aye O Aye O*, repeated during the whole time; and at the sound *O*, the hands were brought together: the dancer





BURCHELL: **PART 3**

Willem camped in the veld on the farm Barendsfontein, near Kaabi's kraal. The songs of the Bushmen can no longer be heard, but you can still find echoes of their stories if you're willing to look. Among the rocks and thorn trees are paintings, stone tools and pieces of ostrich shell.

only, using the syllables *Wawakoo*."

Of the kraal's location, he wrote: "Its situation exposed on every quarter and without a tree to interrupt the view."

The time he spent with Kaabi and others made Burchell realise how wrong the Europeans were about the Bushmen. "It was not rude laughter and boisterous mirth, nor drunken jokes, nor noisy talk, which passes their hours away; but the peaceful, calm emotions of harmless pleasure."

It's quiet around my fire. An aircraft roars through the stars and satellites flash past the Southern Cross.

Not everything is lost

I'm up early to climb every koppie upstream from the stone pyramid. It gets later and I get closer and closer to the N12. Every flattish clearing looks like a possibility, but there are no remains or ruins to be found. By 2 pm I've run out of water and snacks, and my cellphone is about to die.

What did I think I would find? Bushmen aren't known to leave any trace of the places they lived in; no foundations were dug and no fences were built. It makes sense that I can't find anything. I'm far from my campsite and I've probably already passed the place where Kaabi's kraal once stood.

There's only one hill left, near the N12. It doesn't look promising but I don't want to spend the rest of my life wondering about it, so I climb to the top. The summit is flat and open; not a tree in sight.

What's that around my feet? Pieces of ostrich eggshell. I look around and find more. Also sharpened stones, and other stones used to sharpen those stones...

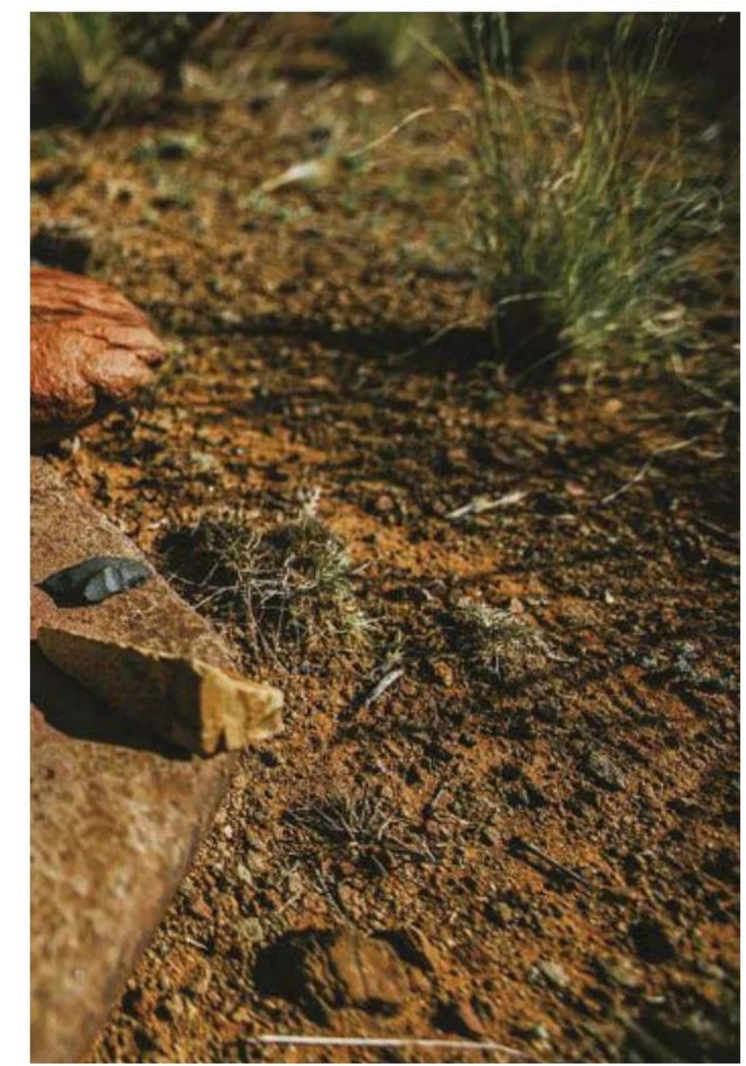
My mind reels. I walk into Kaabi's kraal and see the 20 reed-mat huts, like a circle of tortoiseshells with their doors all facing inwards. A fire burns in the middle. Women sit and talk. Some of the men sharpen their arrowheads.

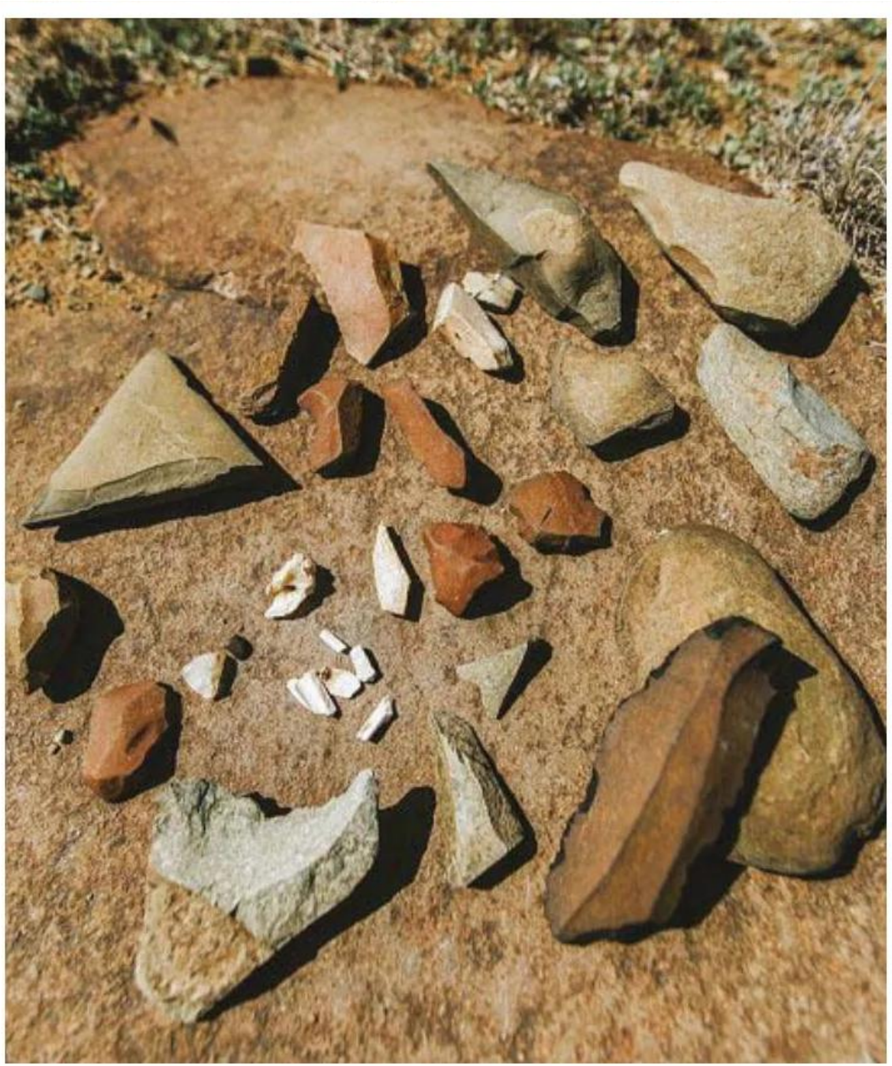
I blink away tears. Thanks for sharing your place with me, Kaabi.

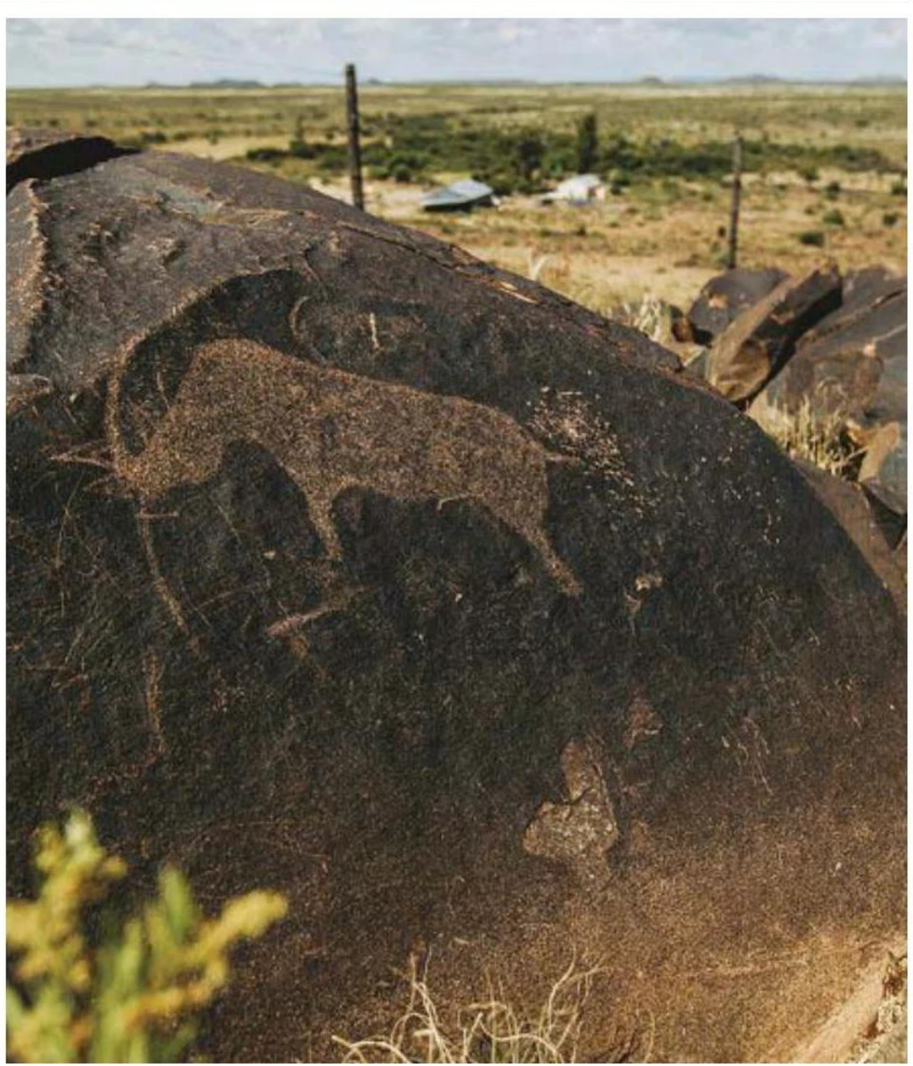
In the next issue, Willem travels to Graaff-Reinet. Read Part 1 and Part 2 of his Burchell-inspired journey in issues #194 and #195.











TAKE YOUR PIC

Want to see your photos in the magazine? Send your best travel or wildlife shots to **Toast Coetzer** and we might publish them here! Send an e-mail to takeyourpic@gomag.co.za

WINNING PHOTO

RUTH SMIT
Canon EOS 7D Mk II
Canon EF 70 – 200 mm lens

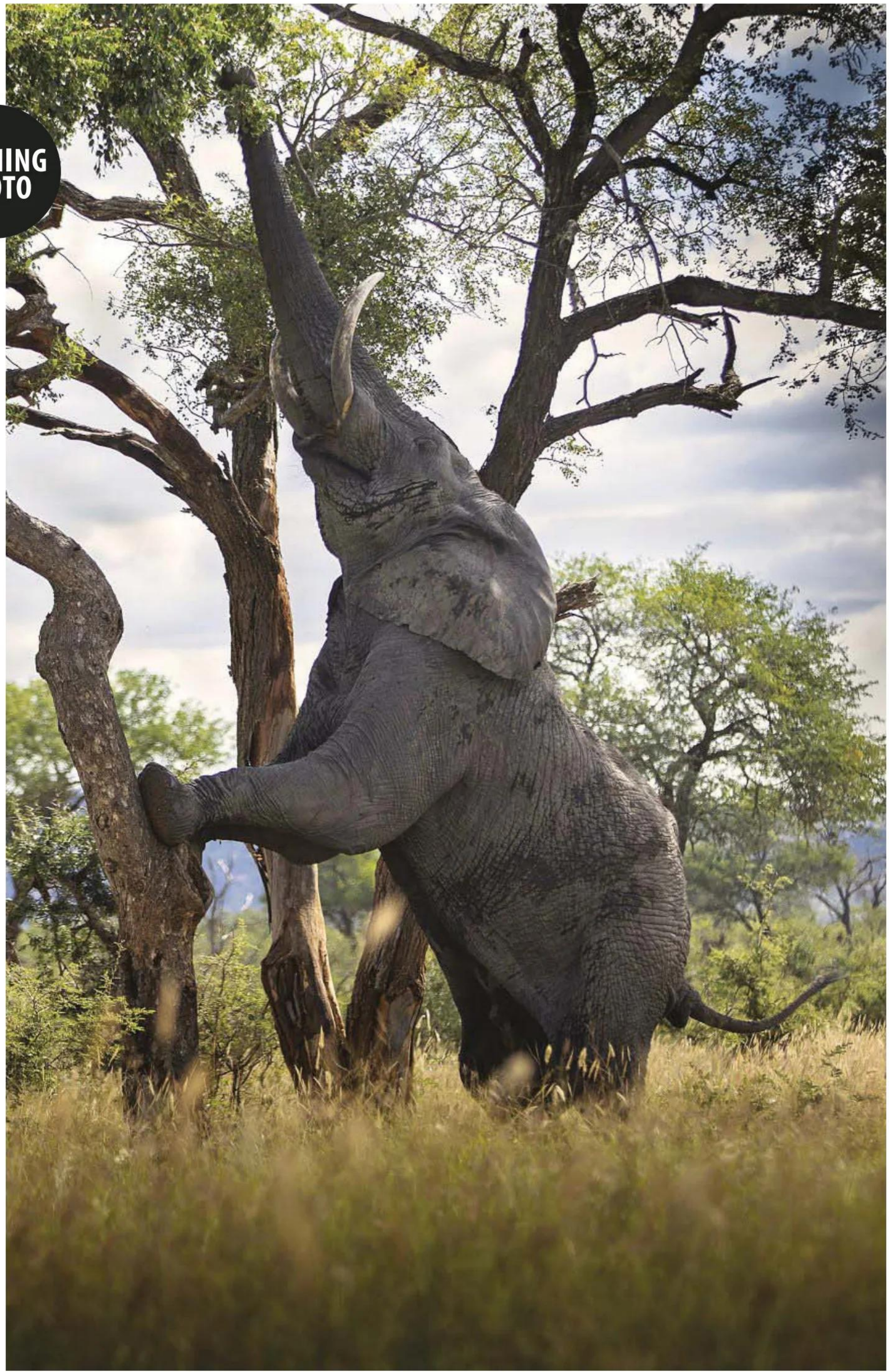
RUTH WRITES: I was in the Kruger Park with my family and we were driving somewhere between Lower Sabie and the Tshokwane picnic site. We stopped to watch this elephant stretch gracefully to reach the juicy green leaves in the canopy of a tree. The elephant put its front legs on the trunk and started eating.

TOAST SAYS: This special moment resonates with me. It's more than just the sum of its parts: It has a sense of place and you can almost hear the sounds of the leaves being stripped by that agile, powerful trunk, and the leathery clunk of the ellie's feet as it finds balance against the tree.

Ruth did all the basics right. You'd normally frame an elephant horizontally (if it's standing or walking, its body dimensions fit better that way) but the vertical framing here is key to emphasizing the animal's unusual bipedal body position.

Ruth also did well to balance the lighting: The shaded parts aren't too dark and the sunny parts aren't overexposed. I love the three outstretched parts of the elephant: its trunk, its front feet and the flick of its tail, which seems to lift the ellie those extra few centimetres. These three points of interest create a kind of triangle that holds your eye in the frame.

It's a photograph that tells a story, and that's why Ruth wins the camera bag this time. Well done!





CAROLINE CELLIERS

IG: @sheepish_overlander
Canon EOS 1000D
Sigma 150 – 500 mm lens

CAROLINE WRITES: My husband Sheldon and I visited Zambia's South Luangwa National Park during the end of the wet season, in March and April 2024. (Sheldon often does work in the park; this was the first time I'd accompanied him.)

On a guided game drive, we slowly approached a female waterbuck on our left. As we stopped, I noticed two young males on our right. They were inquisitive but kept their distance. As I was admiring the one bull, the other one was spooked by something in the bush and stopped directly behind the first one, which made it seem like I was "seeing double".

I picked up my camera and quickly lowered myself in the safari vehicle – I was sitting in the highest seat but wanted to be at eye level with the closest bull. Seconds later, they ran off!

TOAST SAYS: Nature is full of repetitive patterns and shapes. An alert photographer will spot them and turn them into striking photographs. For example, you might be photographing a herd of elephants drinking at a waterhole. From a side-on perspective, at certain moments, the curling trunks of three different elephants might complement each another.

Caroline recognised the "seeing double" effect and acted quickly before the buck changed positions. The two bulls were of similar size and their horns are similar in length – the wider arch of the front bull's horns makes a perfect frame around the other waterbuck, which – as luck would have it – has a narrower set of horns.

As Hannibal used to say in the *A-Team*, back in the 1980s: "I love it when a plan comes together!"



WILLEM KRUGER

Nikon Z6
Nikon 600 mm lens

WILLEM WRITES: I took this photo in my garden when I lived in Bloemfontein. (I've since retired and moved to Herolds Bay.)

Two southern masked-weavers were fighting under a tree. A red-eyed bulbul flew overhead – it wasn't impressed! The birds were perfectly illuminated by the late-afternoon sun and they were against an open space leading to a bush, which made for a nice, dark background.

My shutter speed was 1/6 400 second; aperture f14 and ISO 800.

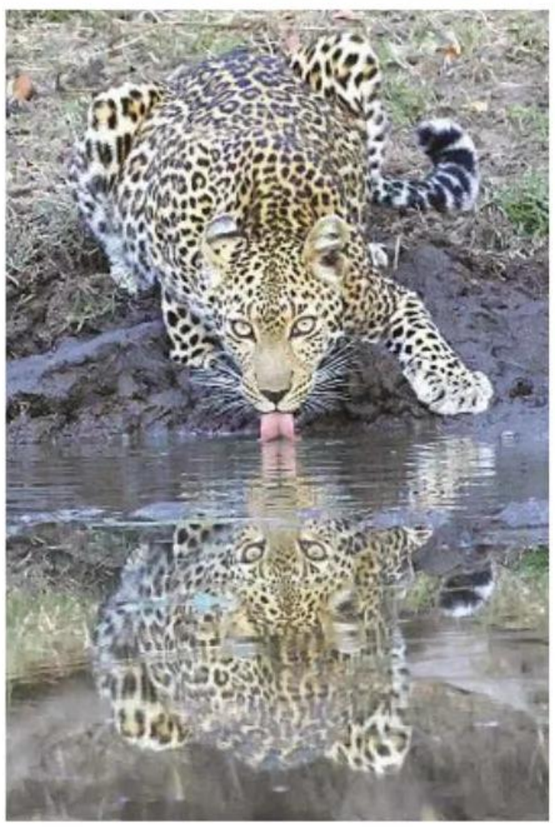
TOAST SAYS: Willem's action shot proves that your own garden can be a theatre for gripping wildlife photography. Most of us – Willem included – would probably want to be in a properly wild theatre like the Kgalagadi, but it's simply not easy to get there regularly.

Get to know all the corners of your garden. Where do birds like to perch? Are there bare branches near the bird bath for them to sit on? How does the sun move from the morning to afternoon? This will enable you to identify where you'll find the best photo opportunities.

I like the circle formed by the three birds. Your eye goes to the weavers first, and then to the bulbul. Because the bulbul is looking down, your eye goes there too, back to the weavers, completing the circle. The red eyes of both species are a bonus in the frame.

Nice one, Willem – we look forward to seeing what you manage to photograph in your new garden in Herolds Bay! (Visit Willem's website to see more of his work: willemkruger.wordpress.com)





JURIE MAREE

Sony a9 III
Sony FE 200 – 600 mm lens

JURIE WRITES: I live in Centurion and took this photo of a goliath heron from a boat on Mongena Dam in Dinokeng Game Reserve north of Pretoria.

It was a sunrise cruise and we had to be at the departure point at Mongena Private Game Lodge at 6 am – on an icy morning in August. It was still dark!

I haven't had much luck with photos in Dinokeng in the past, but this boat cruise was different. When the sun peeked out at 7.30 am, I got a few great shots, including this one half an hour later when the light was still soft and golden. I used a shutter speed of 1/1 250 second.

I had just bought my new Sony a9 III and I wanted to test it out properly. Despite the cold, there were many birds active on the dam – I also got photographs of ducks, cormorants and even a crocodile.

LOUIS HAARHOFF

Canon R7
Canon EF 100 – 400 mm lens

LOUIS WRITES: A friend and I visited the Kruger Park in July 2024 to work as SANParks Honorary Rangers. I helped with administrative work in the rest camps, like checking camping permits, and she received training to care for the tracker dogs used by the anti-poaching unit.

We were busy most of the day and didn't get much time to view game, but we still saw four of the Big Five – all but a leopard. On our last afternoon in the park, we quickly dropped by Lake Panic near Skukuza at 4 pm. It was quiet when we arrived and we watched the hippos in the dam. Then I heard someone say: "There's a leopard!"

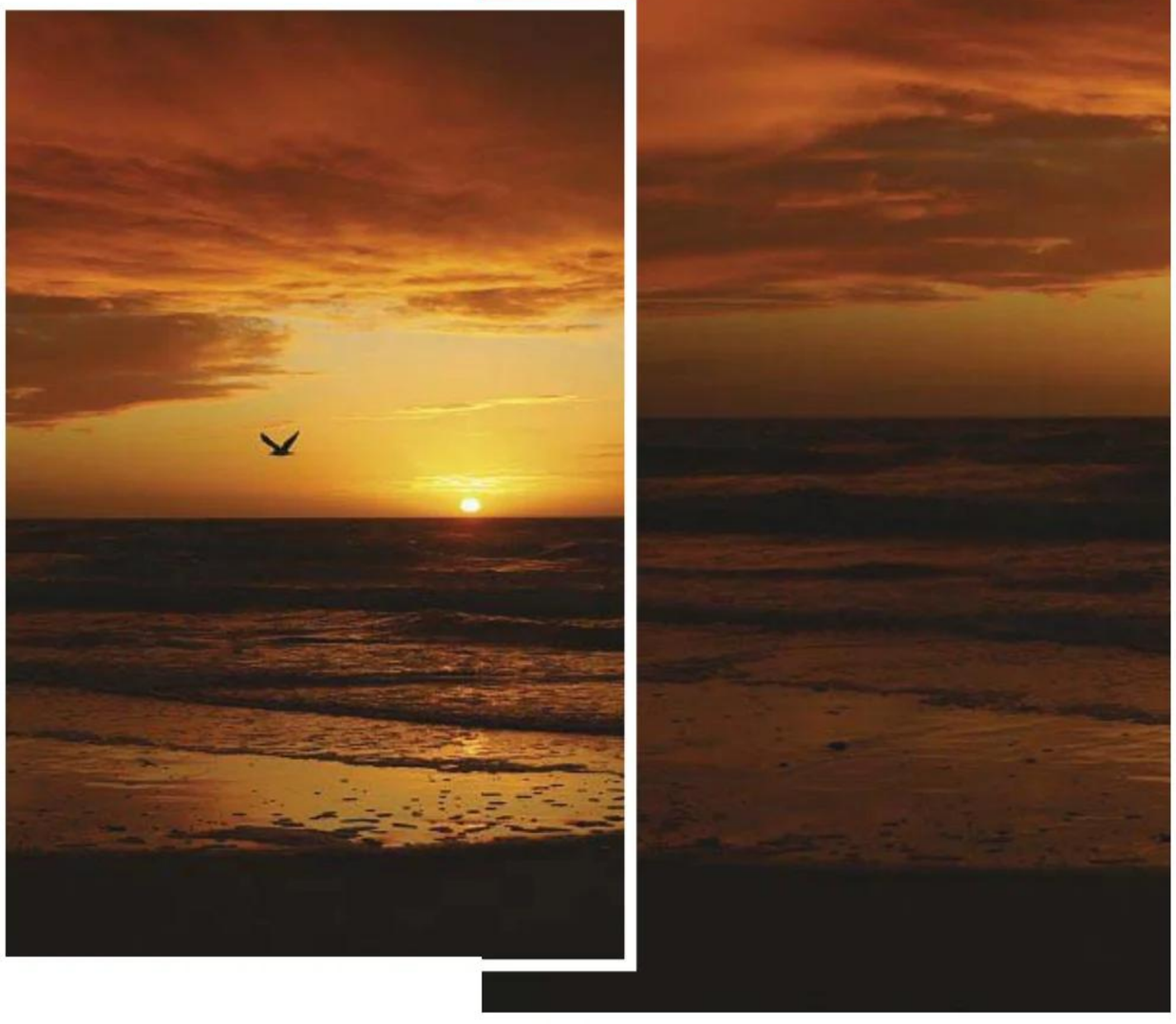
I couldn't believe my eyes when it lay down on its stomach to drink.

TOAST SAYS: One of the golden rules of wildlife photography is to always be prepared. Louis acted quickly and captured this fleeting moment, even if he was a little shaky with excitement… I would have been, too.

The yellow eyes of the leopard, the pink tongue lapping at the water, and that front paw carefully placed on the mud as if the leopard didn't want to get too dirty – all of these elements make for a striking photo.

The only thing I'd change is the framing. I'd crop the shot vertically (see inset) to cut out the dead space to the left and right of the leopard. This would give the photo even more impact.

Thanks for sharing, Louis, and good luck with your volunteer work in the park!



TOAST SAYS: The goliath heron has a good name – it's the biggest heron species in the world, standing up to 1,5 m tall! If you were sitting in your Ford Ranger and a goliath heron walked up to your window, it would look you straight in the eye…

The warm light catches the rusty brown of the bird's feathers. You can't even tell how cold it was. Don't be seduced by that early morning (or late afternoon) glow – you still need to concentrate so that you don't overexpose your shot. If you look closely, the white feathers under the heron's eye and bill are too white…

Still, Jurie did well by using a wide frame to include the wings, legs and head of the heron with enough breathing room in the frame. Don't frame too tightly when you take an action photo – rather crop the shot on your computer later if you think it will improve the image. In Jurie's case cropping isn't necessary because everything in the frame contributes to the success of the photo.





< MARIUS HERBST

Canon EOS 80D
Canon 18 – 135 mm lens

MARIUS WRITES: My wife Annemarie and I visited the Kruger Park for the first time in 2012 and we fell in love with nature, birdlife and photography. Since then, we've travelled to all the provinces and taken thousands of photos, especially of birds.

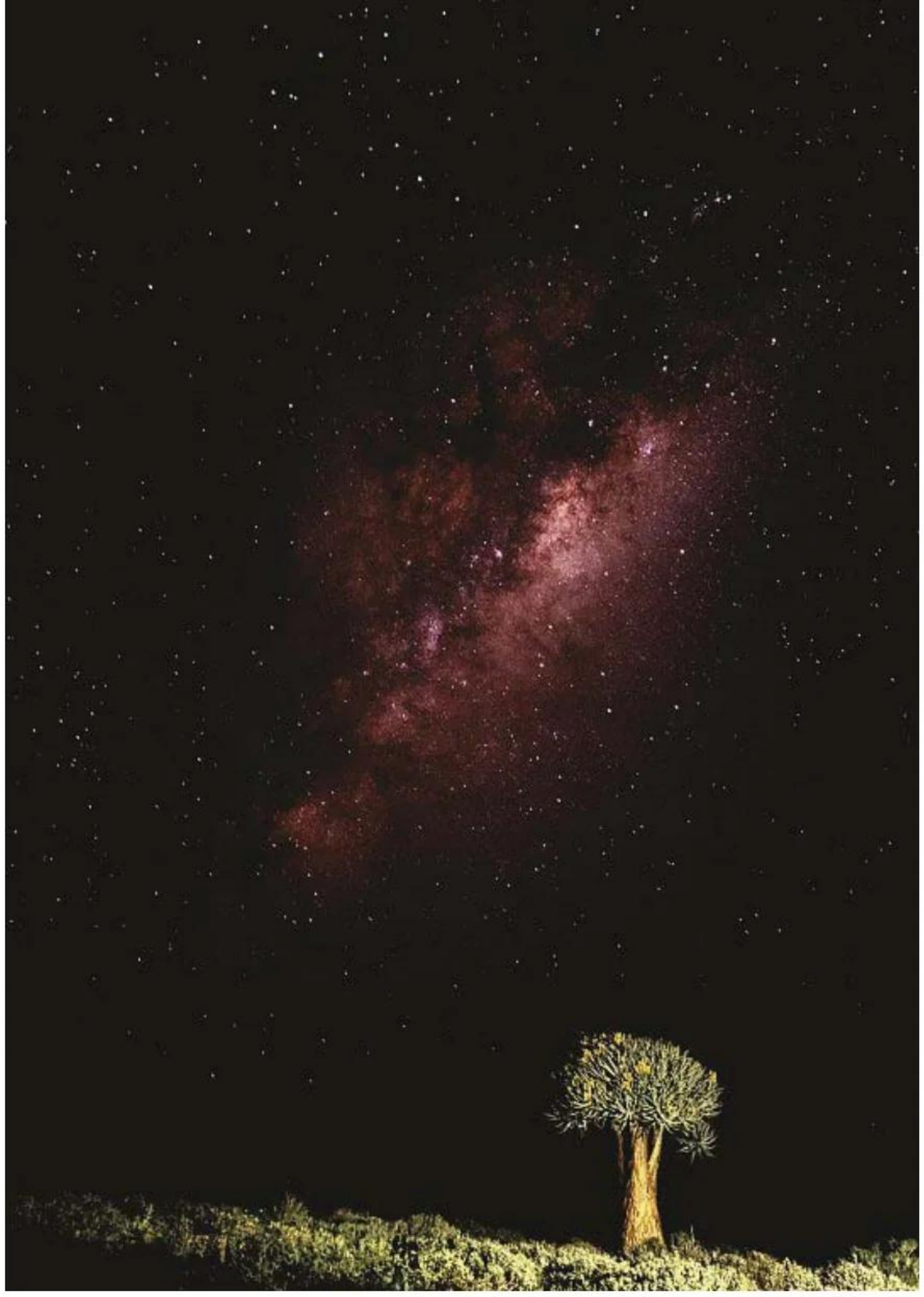
We used to live in Pretoria but we semigrated in 2023 and we now live in Dwarskersbos on the West Coast. It feels like there aren't enough hours in the day to live out my passion for photography – even more so when the wildflowers bloom in spring.

I photographed this sunset on the beach at Dwarskersbos using Annemarie's camera. I hope my photo makes it into the magazine!

TOAST SAYS: One of the perks of my job is chatting to readers like Marius on e-mail and publishing reader photos in this magazine. (I've been doing it for nearly two decades…) This is what Take Your Pic is all about – these pages belong to *you*!

A sunset is both the easiest and hardest thing to photograph. It's easy because the orange and red colours in the sky will make everyone go ooh and aah. But it's hard because how do you make your photo stand out from all the other sunset photos taken that day?

The seagull in Marius's picture is the X factor. I would have framed the photo differently by cropping it using editing software. Framed vertically (see inset), the most important elements – the bird and the setting sun – are much stronger. Cut out the empty space to the left and right when it doesn't contribute to your photo.



DEONITA VAN DIJK

iPhone 14 Pro Max

DEONITA WRITES: Every July, a group of us head to the Tankwa Karoo to celebrate a friend's birthday. This time we stayed at Tankwa River Lodge. I noticed this quiver tree as soon as we arrived. I told my sister that I just had to photograph it.

The stars were spectacular that night. My sister, her son and I walked through the veld to the tree. I use an app called Night Sky, which shows how the Milky Way moves depending on where you are. My timing was spot-on. My sister lit up the quiver tree using her phone torch and I took the pic using my iPhone 14 Pro Max set to Night mode and stabilised on a selfie-stick tripod. To trigger the camera, I used a Bluetooth remote. I had to move around a few times and I took several shots; this one was my favourite.

I know it's not the best photo ever taken, but I was impressed with what I could do with a cellphone!

TOAST SAYS: I'm impressed too, Deonita! Nearly every modern smartphone takes better photos than a point-and-shoot digital camera from 10 years ago. Phones have swallowed the point-and-shoot camera segment completely. Top-of-the-range models like your iPhone take excellent pictures and have all kinds of built-in software that can edit the photo without you having to lift a finger. (That's why contrasty landscape photos often look better when taken with a cellphone instead of with a conventional digital camera – the software balances the exposure almost magically.)

Most smartphones have some kind of "night" mode, which tells the phone camera to use a longer shutter speed of two or three seconds. (Browse your settings – click "More" on a Samsung, for example.) Because of the slow shutter speed, it's important to keep your phone stable by balancing it on a table or using a tripod, like Deonita did.

The quiver tree makes this photo extra special – lekker!

SEND US YOUR BEST TRAVEL AND NATURE PHOTOS!

WHY? We publish a selection of reader pictures in every issue. Don't be shy, haul out those shots you've been hoarding on your computer and send them to us! We like just about anything: wildlife, landscapes, portraits, holiday snaps or bugs in your garden.

HOW? Send your photos to **takeyourpic@gomag.co.za**
Submit only your three best shots each month. Don't send files bigger than 4 MB – if we need a bigger version, we'll ask for it. Give the name, surname, home town and contact number of the photographer. Also include info about where and how the shot was taken, and what equipment was used. If you manipulated your photo in any way, tell us what you did.

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Jaw dropping!

COMPILED BY **LYNNE FRASER**

There are certain genres of photography where the stratospheric leaps in technology over the last decade have changed the game. "Underwater" is one such genre: As cameras and lenses have become faster and able to render beautifully detailed images in even the dimmest conditions, photographers have been able to capture ever more impressive scenes of life below the surface of oceans, lakes and rivers.

Underwater Photographer of the Year is a prestigious international competition that honours the work of these photographers and their role in conserving our vulnerable aquatic environments. The 2024 edition attracted more than 6 500 entries in various categories. "As always, the collection is a great reminder that while underwater photography is a specialist discipline, there is huge diversity within it. Our winning photographers come from around the world, as do their images," said Alex Mustard, chair of the UPY jury.

To see all the winners and to find out how to enter next year's competition, visit underwaterphotographeroftheyear.com

The end of the bait ball

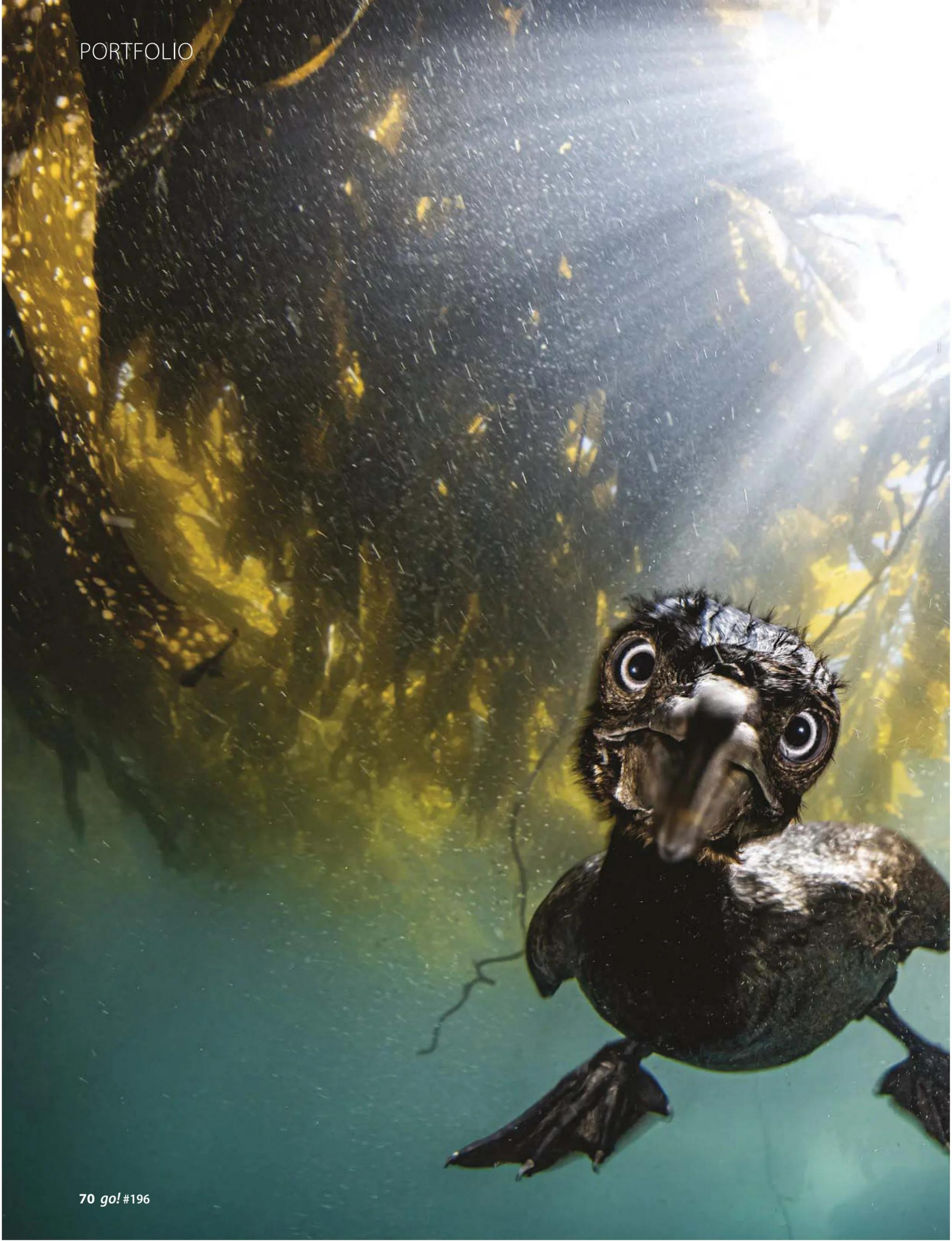
Rafael Fernandez Caballero, Spain

"At the end of 2023, I was fortunate to experience this unique spectacle in Mexico's Magdalena Bay. Due to warmer water caused by El Niño, more species than ever joined the hunt. Bait balls of sardines attracted a variety of predators, but the main stars of the show were the Bryde's whales, which visited Baja in perhaps larger numbers than ever before. They patrolled the waters hoping to get their bellies full of sardines.

"This photo shows the very moment of attack, with the whale's ventral pleats wide open and filtering the prey from the water using its baleen, after engulfing hundreds of kilograms of sardines in one bite."

Rafael's photo was the winner in the Behaviour category.

HOW: Nikon Z9; Nikkor 14 – 30 mm lens; aperture f10; shutter speed 1/400 second; ISO 640; in an Isotta housing.



< Attack from above

Jon Anderson, United States

"Last summer, at a popular dive site in Monterey, California, the cormorants seemed to be more active and curious than usual. I planned a dive on a sunny afternoon, hoping to catch a cormorant in the kelp forest with shafts of sun piercing the canopy. Numerous cormorants approached me, pecked at my head and dive tank, and followed me around. One even tried to bite my camera! This one paused for a moment, perhaps after seeing its reflection in the dome port, allowing me to take its portrait.

"Countless species, including cormorants, depend on healthy kelp forests to thrive. Unfortunately, California's kelp forests have declined by more than 80% in the last decade due to warmer water and unchecked predation by urchins."

Jon's photo was runner-up in the Portrait category.

HOW: Nikon D850; Nikkor 8 – 15 mm lens; aperture f14; shutter speed 1/125 second; ISO 640; with two Retra Pro strobes and a Nauticam housing.

PORTFOLIO



Window of opportunity

Lisa Stengel, United States

"I travelled to Baja, Mexico, in the hope of witnessing marlin feeding on the sardine bait balls that form in Magdalena Bay at certain times of year, but the unusually high water temperatures kept the marlin far offshore. Instead, the warmer water caused an interesting phenomenon: Thousands of mahi mahi, or dorado, arrived to feast on the sardines.

"Underwater, I noticed a distinct noise from the bait ball every time the dorado would attempt to hit its target. I focussed on that sound and followed it with my camera. This technique, coupled with serendipitous conditions, gave me the window of opportunity to capture this special moment."

Lisa was the winner in the Up and Coming category.

HOW: Sony Alpha A7 III; 16 – 35 mm lens; aperture f6.3; shutter speed 1/3 200 second; ISO 1 000; in a Nauticam housing.

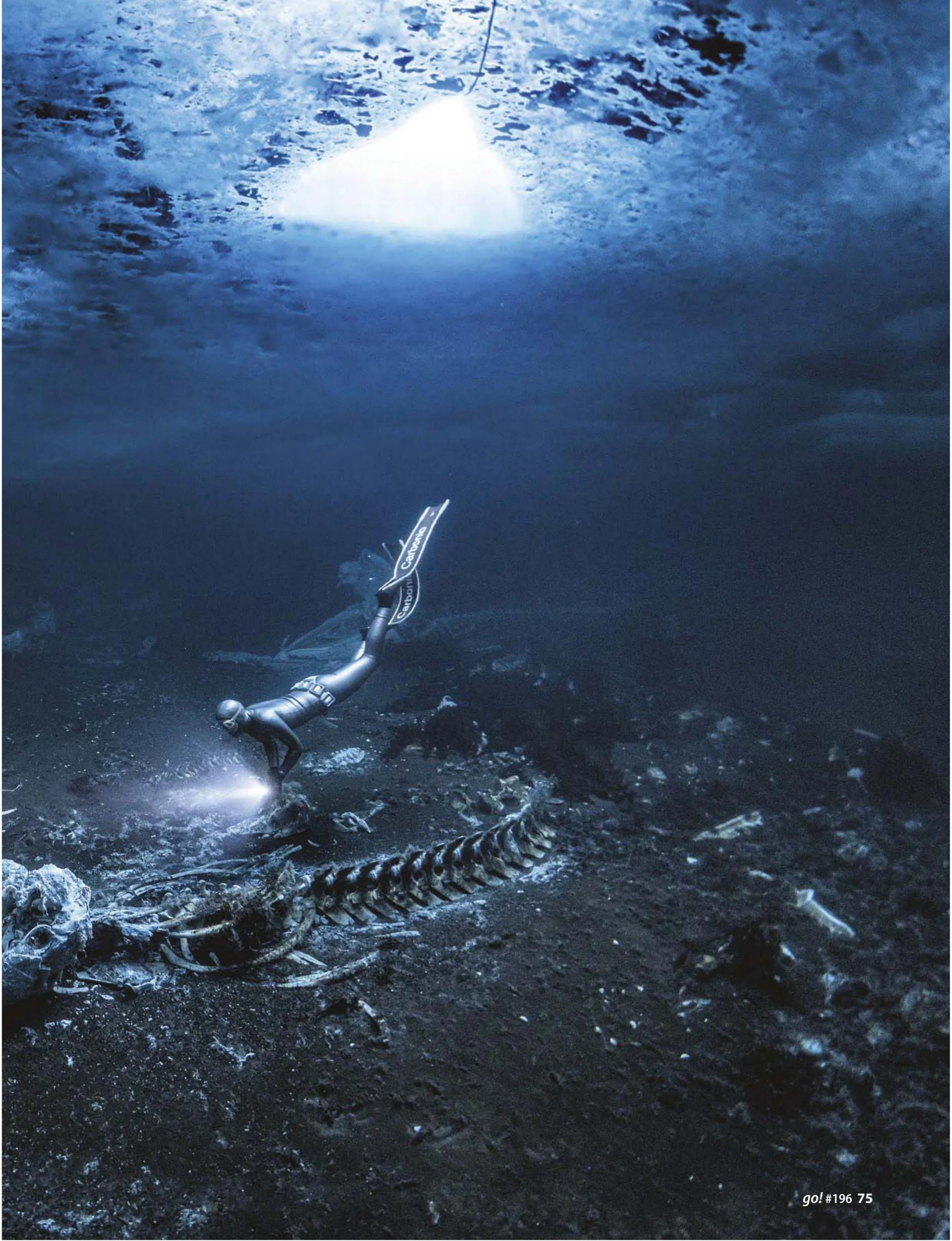
Whale bones

Alex Dawson, Sweden

In Tasiilaq in eastern Greenland, local hunters bring their catch and share it with each other. From a stable population of more than 100 000 minke whales in the North Atlantic, the hunters typically take less than a dozen. The whale is pulled up onto the beach during high tide; at low tide, many families gather to cut off the skin, blubber and meat. Almost all the whale is consumed except the skeleton, which is pulled back into the sea by the next high tide. There, various marine invertebrates and fish pick the bones clean.

This photo won the Wide-Angle category and was judged the overall winner of the competition. "Photographed in the toughest conditions, a breath-hold diver descends below the Greenland ice sheet to bear witness to slaughtered whales," said chief judge Alex Mustard. "The masterful composition invites me to consider our impact on the great creatures of this planet."

HOW: Nikon Z7 II; Nikkor 8 – 15 mm lens; aperture f4.5, shutter speed 1/60 second; ISO 500; in a Nauticam housing.


Carbonio
Carbonio

Gochujang chicken skewers

Spring chicken!

Spring is in the air and you want to spend your evenings outside around the braai fire. Add these delicious dishes to your repertoire.

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

Lemon, mint and chilli chicken


Crispy chicken livers with brandy cream sauce


Sweet curried chicken with desiccated coconut

Gochujang chicken skewers

Makes **8 skewers**
Preparation time **15 minutes**
Cooking time **20 minutes**

You need

- **12 chicken thigh fillets**
- **8 spring onions**
- **salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- **1 tablespoon olive oil**
- **1 tablespoon toasted sesame seeds**
- **1 red chilli, chopped (optional)**

FOR THE SAUCE

- **3 tablespoons gochujang sauce (we used Flaming Thai)**
- **2 tablespoons tomato sauce**
- **½ teaspoon garlic powder**
- **1 tablespoon honey**
- **1 teaspoon vinegar**
- **2 teaspoons soya sauce**

Here's how

1 Cut the thighs in half. Cut each spring onion into 4 cm pieces. Thread the chicken and spring onions onto 8 short skewers, alternating the ingredients. (Soak the skewers in water beforehand so they don't catch fire over the coals.) Season with salt and pepper, and coat with olive oil. Set aside while you light the fire – you need hot coals.
2 Whisk the ingredients for the sauce together in a bowl.
3 Braai the chicken until flavoursome and almost done. Remove the skewers from the fire, put them in a dish, and baste with the sauce before you return them to the grid. Baste the chicken with the last of the sauce when it becomes glossy. Scatter over the sesame seeds and chilli and serve.

TIP *These chicken skewers are a delicious appetiser and you can eat them straight from the grid. For a summer meal, serve with sticky rice, kimchi, gherkins, strawberries and green vegetables.*

Lemon, mint and chilli chicken

Serves **4**
Preparation time **40 minutes**
Cooking time **15 – 20 minutes**

You need

- **½ cup fresh mint leaves, roughly chopped**
- **½ cup flat-leaf parsley, roughly chopped**
- **pinch of saffron or turmeric, (optional)**
- **1 dried chilli**
- **1 fresh red chilli**
- **juice of 1 or 2 lemons**
- **4 skinless chicken breast fillets, cut into strips**
- **salt and pepper, to taste**
- **1 cup couscous**
- **1 teaspoon olive oil, plus extra**
- **1 cup weak chicken stock, boiling hot**
- **100 g feta, cubed**
- **¼ cup dried cranberries or sultanas**
- **2 baby marrows, sliced and roasted**
- **200 g fine green beans, steamed**

Here's how

1 Add the herbs to a measuring jug with the saffron, chillies and lemon juice. Use a stick blender to blitz until fine. Pour two-thirds of the marinade over the chicken and marinate for 30 minutes.
2 Heat a griddle pan until hot. Shake most of the marinade off the chicken strips and roast them in the pan until browned with nice char lines on both sides. (Don't overcrowd the pan.) When the chicken is cooked, season to taste with salt and pepper and remove from the heat. Repeat the process until all the chicken is cooked.
3 Add a dash of olive oil to the remaining marinade and pour it over the chicken.
4 Mix the couscous with the olive oil in a glass bowl with a lid. Stir until all the grains are covered. Pour the stock over the couscous and close the lid. Leave to steam

for 5 minutes. Use a fork to separate the grains and add salt and pepper if the stock isn't savoury enough for you. Mix the couscous with the feta, cranberries and vegetables and serve with the saucy chicken.

TIP *This recipe is my interpretation of an old favourite by Nigel Slater. The preparation of the chicken is fast and fat-free. You can also replace the couscous with quinoa and add roasted sweet potato.*



Pineapple chicken

Crispy chicken livers with brandy cream sauce

Serves **4**
Preparation time **40 minutes**
Cooking time **10 – 15 minutes**

You need

- **500 g chicken livers**
- **½ cup milk**
- **½ teaspoon each paprika and dried herbs**
- **½ cup cornflour**
- **½ cup self-raising flour**
- **salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- **3 eggs**
- **about 2½ cups Panko crumbs**
- **oil, for deep-frying**
- **lemon wedges, to serve**

Here's how

1 Make sure the livers are clean and cut to the same size. Prick the livers with a fork – this will prevent them from bursting open when you deep-fry them. Soak them in the milk, paprika and herbs for 20 minutes.
2 Mix the cornflour and self-raising flour together in a bowl and season with salt and pepper. Beat the eggs with a little water in a second bowl and add the crumbs to a third bowl. Dip each piece of liver in the flour, followed by the egg and then the crumbs until completely coated.
3 Heat about 2 cm of oil in a deep pan until hot. Test the oil with a small piece of bread – if it floats to the surface, the oil is ready. Deep-fry the livers until golden brown and crispy. Bigger pieces might still be pink inside so use bite-sized pieces if you prefer them cooked through. Serve with your favourite chilli sauce as an appetiser or add chakalaka or a brandy cream sauce (see below) and mashed potatoes for a meal.

Brandy cream sauce

Fry 1 finely chopped **white onion** in 2 tablespoons of **butter** and a dash of **olive oil** until glossy. (You can also add one or two **fresh bay leaves**.) Add 1 tablespoon each of **Worcestershire sauce** and **Dijon mustard**, followed by a shot (30 ml) of **brandy**. Bring the sauce to a boil. If you're cooking on gas, you can even let it catch fire so most of the alcohol evaporates. Add a cup of **cream** and simmer until the sauce thickens. Season with **salt** and freshly ground **black pepper**.

Sweet curried chicken with desiccated coconut

Serves **8 as an appetiser**
Preparation time **15 minutes, plus time to marinate**
Cooking time **15 – 20 minutes**

You need

- **16 chicken wings and/or drumsticks**
- **salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- **2 tablespoons desiccated coconut or coconut flakes (optional)**

FOR THE MARINADE

- **1 teaspoon mild curry powder (or more to taste)**
- **½ cup buttermilk**
- **1 teaspoon cornflour**
- **¼ cup apricot jam**
- **1 tablespoon Dijon mustard**
- **1 tablespoon brandy**
- **2 bay leaves**

Here's how

1 Beat all the ingredients for the marinade together and add the chicken. Marinate in the fridge for at least an hour (preferably overnight). Remove the chicken from the fridge when you light the braai fire so it can get up to room temperature.
2 Season the chicken with salt and pepper and braai over medium-hot coals until cooked through. Baste the chicken with marinade throughout, turning the grid regularly. Sprinkle over the coconut before serving – it will cling to the sticky sauce. Alternatively, use finely chopped roasted peanuts to give the chicken a delicious texture.

TIP *The sweetness of the jam is stronger than the taste of curry so the whole family can enjoy this dish. For more of a kick, use hot curry powder in a larger quantity.*



Peri peri chicken sliders

Peri peri chicken sliders

Makes **8 sliders**
Preparation time **20 minutes, plus time to marinate**
Cooking time **15 minutes**

You need

- **4 chicken breast fillets**
- **2 tablespoons olive oil**
- **salt and black pepper**
- **3 tablespoons butter**
- **8 small Portuguese rolls, cut in half**
- **1 small cos lettuce, shredded**
- **1 big tomato, sliced (or use cherry tomatoes)**

FOR THE MARINADE

- **2 tablespoons olive oil**
- **½ cup dry white wine**
- **2 bay leaves (fresh or dried)**
- **4 cloves of garlic, thinly sliced**
- **2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice**
- **1 teaspoon peri peri spices (or to taste)**
- **1 red chilli, chopped**

Here's how

1 Cut each chicken breast in half along its length and put it in a steel roaster. Combine the ingredients for the marinade and pour it over the chicken. Set aside for 30 minutes.
2 Heat the oil in a heavy-bottomed pan. Remove the chicken breasts from the marinade one by one, shake off the excess sauce and fry over a high heat until both sides are brown and the chicken is cooked. Repeat the process with all the pieces, season to taste with salt and pepper, and set aside to rest.
3 Melt the butter in the same pan, add the marinade and simmer until thickened. Dip the sliced side of the bread rolls in the butter sauce. Add lettuce, tomato and a piece of chicken to each roll. Serve the rest of the marinade as a dipping sauce. It's messy but delicious.

TIP *If you don't like spicy food, use a big red chilli (it doesn't have as much bite as a small one) and remove the seeds, and replace the peri peri with chicken spices (without added salt).*

Pineapple chicken

Serves **6**
Preparation time **15 minutes**
Cooking time **40 minutes**

You need

- **6 chicken quarters (leg-and-thigh pieces)**
- **1 tablespoon sesame oil**
- **salt and freshly ground black pepper**

FOR THE SAUCE

- **1 tin (440 g) pineapple rings**
- **⅓ cup low-sodium soya sauce**
- **2 tablespoons light brown sugar**
- **3 tablespoons tomato sauce**
- **3 tablespoons red wine vinegar**
- **1 teaspoon each chopped fresh ginger and garlic**
- **a few sprigs of thyme**
- **1 tablespoon cornflour**

Here's how

1 Baste the chicken with the sesame oil and season with salt and pepper. Braai over medium-hot coals until the fat in the skin renders and the meat starts to get crispy. (The size of the chicken quarters will determine the cooking time.)
2 Drain the pineapple rings and mix the juice with the soya sauce, sugar, tomato sauce, vinegar, ginger, garlic and thyme in a pot. Bring to a boil. Stir 2 tablespoons of the sauce into the cornflour to make a paste. Stir the paste into the hot sauce. Cook the sauce for a few minutes until thick and glossy and remove from the heat.
3 Baste the nearly cooked chicken with the sauce and glaze it over the coals. The chicken should be shiny and sticky with just the right amount of charring. Braai the pineapple rings on a grid or in a griddle pan until charred. Serve the chicken and pineapple with your favourite side dishes – big potato wedges and a green salad work well.

NATIONAL LUNA PROMOTION

COST CUTTER

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.

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.



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*

Trail takkies for everyone

Robust, waterproof hiking boots that protect your ankles are great for a multi-day trek over wild terrain, but sometimes you need a lighter, comfier pair of shoes for a day outing with the kids. The latest trail shoes are not just for runners: There are great options for hikers and walkers, too.

BY PIERRE STEYN



GALLO/GETTYIMAGES.COM



CHOOSE THE RIGHT SHOE FOR YOU

If you want to chuck a caracal into the chicken coop, mention things like "heel drop" and "minimalist barefoot shoes" to a group of keen trail runners or hikers. The resultant argument will be worse than a bunch of Province and Bulls supporters having a go at each other in a bar on the eve of the Currie Cup final.

Over the years, shoe design has been engulfed in so much pseudoscience that the average outdoor enthusiast is more confused than ever. And besides, there are hundreds of shoes to choose from these days. Here's the fact of the matter: There is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to footwear. Our feet are like our fingerprints – and our personalities. Every foot is different.

Most good sports shops that specialise in road running, trail running and hiking will be able to analyse your old running shoes – and your running style – and suggest a suitable pair of shoes. A podiatrist can do the same.

But never underestimate the value of your own common sense:

- If you've been running or walking with one type of shoe for years, without sustaining any injuries or persistent niggles, there's probably no reason to change. Those shoes are clearly working for you.
- You wouldn't buy a new car without test driving it; do the same with shoes. Lace them up in the store, walk around and try change direction sharply every few steps. If something doesn't feel good in those first few minutes – if the shoes are not completely comfortable – then that niggle is only going to cause greater discomfort later.
- Part of that "comfy" feeling is the shoe not feeling too tight or too loose. Does your foot roll inward when you walk? Maybe you need a shoe that offers a little more arch support? But comfort above all else!



SALOMON SPEEDCROSS 6

The Speedcross is the shoe that "kicked" off a revolution in trail running nearly 20 years ago. Designed to be tough yet lightweight, they allowed athletes to run fast in the Alps without sacrificing foot protection. The shoe's designer, a Frenchman called Reglan Brewer, apparently drew inspiration from off-road motorcycles.

Now in its sixth iteration, the Speedcross has a devoted following. Many hikers simply trade in their worn-out pair for the next model. The upper is made from tear-resistant ripstop nylon combined with dense mesh fabric to keep out sand and twigs.

While traditional laces are still preferred by some, I'm a fan of the Salomon's "Quicklace" system, which allows you to fasten or unfasten the shoe with a single pull.

The Speedcross excels on rough terrain where extra grip is essential, but on tar, concrete, and hard jeep track, it sometimes feels like walking in rugby boots.

R2 800 **salomonsports.co.za**



ALTRA TIMP 5

Years of road running and doing multi-day hikes have taken a toll on my feet, leading to a thickening of the tissue around a nerve in my right foot. This condition was likely caused by wearing the wrong shoes, which compressed my toes for too long. (Apparently this is a common issue for people who regularly wear high heels.)

Walking and running had become so uncomfortable that I feared my running days were over. That's when Lynne Fraser, *go!* art director, came to my rescue. Fun fact: Lynne lives in Toronto, Canada, these days. When she's not creating beautiful pages, she spends her time hiking and running. No surprise that she's an expert on trail shoes.

"Get yourself a pair of Altras," she said.

It was the first time I'd heard of the brand, but Altras are specifically designed with a spacious toe box, giving each toe plenty of wiggle room. Also, unlike most other road- and trail-running shoes, which typically have a drop between the heel and the forefoot (about 10 mm on average), Altra shoes have zero drop.

But don't confuse them with minimalist or barefoot shoes; they still incorporate the latest materials to ensure you can run or walk quickly and comfortably over rough ground, but your feet can also move naturally.

I ordered a pair of Timp 4s from Altra's online store (they were on sale for R2 500) and I'm now a convert. The updated Timp 5 is more expensive than most other off-road shoes, but it's worth keeping an eye out for specials.

R3 400 **altrafootwear.co.za**

HI-TEC GEO-TRAIL PRO

Hi-Tec is famous for its hiking boots and shoes; now they've entered the trail market too. This is a good, pocket-friendly option if you've just started trail running or if you're looking for a lightweight trail shoe for weekend hikes.

The rubber tread is quite aggressive – it reminds me of a mountain-bike tyre – and there's a hard bumper at the front to protect your toes.

Despite these beefy additions, the shoe fits comfortably thanks to its mesh upper, rubber heel and seamlessly welded sponge cushioning. The latter reduces the chance of hotspots, which can lead to blisters.

If you've blown most of your hiking budget on other gear, these might still be able to squeeze into the shopping cart. At the time of going to print, they were on sale online for only R500.

R1 600 **hi-tec.co.za**



MERRELL AGILITY PEAK 5

Merrell is like the Toyota of outdoor footwear – there's a model and colour for every need and budget, from minimalist barefoot shoes to rugged waterproof hiking boots like the iconic Moab, favoured by serious hikers.

The toughest and most popular trail shoe Merrell offers is the Agility Peak, now in its fifth version. It's durable, versatile and available in 17 different colour combinations. The Vibram Megagrip outsole (the same as the Altra Timp 5) is renowned for its durability and excellent grip. The widely spaced, prominent lugs on the soles make it ideal for technical terrain where you don't want to slip and slide.

The heel is a whopping 40 mm in height and heavily cushioned, protecting your foot from hard landings, stones and branches. However, this also creates a significant drop of 13,4 mm between the heel and forefoot. If you run lightly through the veld like a klipspringer, landing on your forefoot first, this shoe may not be the best fit. But if you strike the ground with your heel first, like an Airbus A380 touching down, the Agility Peak could be your version of Cinderella's slipper.

R3 100 **merrell.co.za**



COLUMBIA MONTRAIL TRINITY AG 11

Running in some trail shoes, especially minimalist ones, is like driving a sports car – you feel every detail of the road beneath you. You're in close contact with the trail surface and your feet feel light and fast as they dance over rocks and roots. But for some people, this level of "performance" can also be a jarring and painful experience. If you prefer a more luxurious ride, like running in a Range Rover rather than a racing car, Columbia's Montrail shoes offer a perfect blend of comfort and protection.

The American company is probably more renowned for its cosy and warm outdoor clothing. The Montrails are just as much of a treat, but for your feet. They feature an asymmetric lacing system, where the laces follow the natural contours of your foot toward the outer toes. This design helps the shoe fit better and reduces pressure.

All in all, the Montrail is an excellent choice for everyday walking, shorter trail runs and weekend hikes during the drier months, offering a comfortable and supportive experience.

R3 000 **columbiasportswear.co.za**



WIN A BREAK!

These six fantastic establishments each offers our readers a relaxing getaway. Find out how to enter and stand a chance to win. Closing date: 30 November 2024

The Northern Cape is an unforgettable place. From epic sunsets to wildlife and wide open spaces, it's a place that stays with you forever. This collection of lodges, as well as the Red Ox Restaurants in Vanrhynsdorp, the flagship in Upington, with another one opening in Vredendal in March 2025, are all located near or on the way to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. Each one offers a unique Kalahari experience. The Northern Cape Famous Lodges will ensure your road trip and visit to the province and the Kgalagadi is a memorable one.



LETSATSI LIFESTYLE LODGE
Vanrhynsdorp

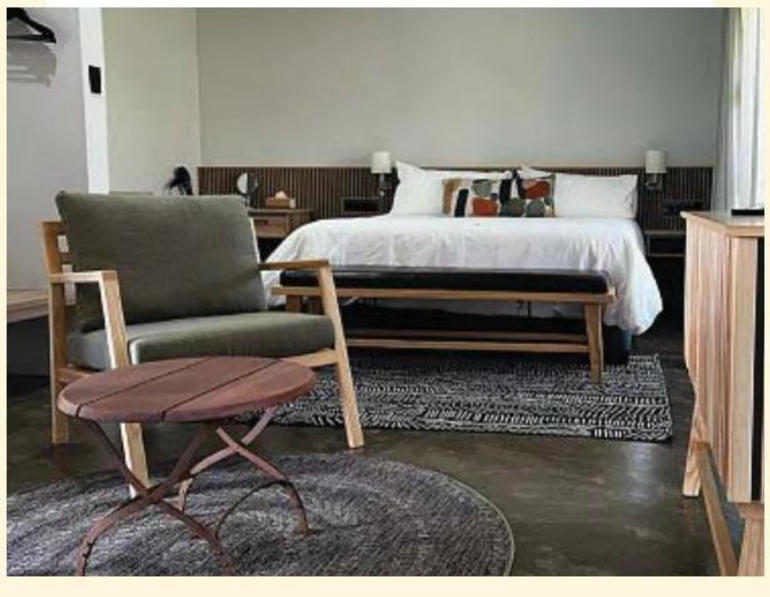
Letsatsi is the Sesotho word for "place of the sun". From cocktails on the hill to a delicious breakfast, this four-star lodge is the ideal stop on the N7 between Cape Town and Springbok, Upington or Namibia. There are glamping tents, luxury double, single and family units available, as well as campsites. Each unit has a braai area, and the campsites have lovely grass stands.

One lucky reader can win a two-night stay for four people (two adults and two children), which includes dinner and breakfast. To enter, SMS LETSATSI LODGE with your name, surname, address, and contact number to 35695. SMSes cost R1,50*
Terms and conditions apply.

KALAHARI LIFESTYLE LODGE
Upington

If you are driving to Upington from Johannesburg, this five-star destination is your first stop and a great place to overnight. They supply breakfast and lunch packs, and they will even fill your coffee flask if you ask. In addition, every guest gets a braaibroodjie or freshly baked bread upon arrival! The Silver Spoon Bistro serves breakfast daily, which you can also order in your room. Services include a car wash, laundry and free Wi-Fi. The private swimming pool and large chess set make the beautiful garden a popular hangout. Conference facilities are also available.

One lucky reader can win a two-night stay for four people (two adults and two children), which includes dinner and breakfast. To enter, SMS KALAHARI LODGE with your name, surname, address, and contact number to 35695. SMSes cost R1,50*
Terms and conditions apply.





TSHAHITSI LODGE
Upington

This lodge offers five-star self-catering options and is the perfect stopover if you are driving to Upington from Johannesburg or Olifantshoek. There are 18 self-catering chalets (including a unit suitable for the disabled), each with DStv, air conditioning and a kitchen. They also offer braai packs, home-made sosaties, ice, wood, water, a car-wash service, a laundry service, overnight freezing facilities, a swimming pool, a giant chess set, wildlife and 24-hour security. Come and enjoy breakfast at the Silver Spoon Bistro.

One lucky reader can win a two-night stay for four people (two adults and two children). This includes breakfast and dinner. To enter, SMS TSHAHITSI and your name, surname, address, and contact number to 35695. SMSes cost R1,50*
Terms and conditions apply.



MOLOPO KALAHARI LODGE
Askham

Molopo Kalahari Lodge is located in the Green Kalahari, just 60 km from the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. It's a three-star lodge with self-catering units and campsites. Activities include sandboarding and exploring the nearby sand dunes. The luxury chalets are equipped with air conditioning and en suite bathrooms, while the campsites have electricity and private bathrooms – it's the best place for a family holiday.

One lucky reader can win a two-night stay for four people (two adults and two children), including dinner and breakfast. To enter, SMS MOLOPO LODGE with your name, surname, address, and contact number to 35695. SMSes cost R1,50*
Terms and conditions apply.

VISCHGAT GAME LODGE
Askham

Vischgat is an exclusive 14 000-hectare sheep and game farm. Game includes gemsbok, springbok, eland, red hartebeest, blue and black wildebeest, among others. Do some game watching, and experience the iconic Kalahari sunsets and red dunes. This self-catering lodge is suitable for small groups of up to 20 people. They offer braai packs, ice, wood, water and alcohol for sale, as well as a laundry service, overnight freezing facilities, a swimming pool, a braai area, a giant chess set and 24-hour security.

One lucky reader can win self-catering accommodation for three nights for four people (two adults and two children). The prize includes a game drive and cocktails on the dunes.

To enter, SMS VISCHGAT with your name, surname, address, and contact number to 35695. SMSes cost R1,50*
Terms and conditions apply.





RED OX STEAKHOUSE
Vredendal
(opens 2025)

The standout name in steakhouse restaurants offers top-quality value. One lucky reader can win lunch for six people worth R3 000 at the brand-new Vredendal branch, opening in March 2025. Like the flagship Upington restaurant, and the Vanrhynsdorp branch, this steakhouse also offers carefully selected décor that immediately makes you feel welcome and delicious local food, with prime cuts of meat and an à la carte menu.

To enter, SMS RED OX VREDENDAL and your name, surname, address, and contact number to 35695. SMSes cost R1,50*
Terms and conditions apply.

For more info, visit www.ncfamouslodges.com
Send an e-mail to info@tshahitsilodge.co.za or call (054) 333 1126

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The perfect Prado?

If you want the latest **Toyota Land Cruiser Prado**, you'll have to get in line. Unlike many other car models, a new "Randburg Royce" only rolls around once every 15 years and is cause for great excitement. So, was it worth the wait?

BY PIERRE STEYN





When the previous Toyota Prado was launched, Kgalema Motlanthe was our state president, Peter de Villiers was the Springbok coach and "Boom Boom Pow" by the Black Eyed Peas was the number one song on the Billboard 100. Yes, 2009 was a *looong* time ago!

I recently got the chance to test drive the new Prado in the thick sand of southern Mozambique. After a balmy beach break in the middle of an icy winter, I returned to Cape Town with little doubt that Toyota has hit the car market with a Boom Boom Pow of its own.

The Prado has always been the "Goldilocks" choice of Toyota's three big 4x4 SUVs. It's not as big, expensive or thirsty as the Land Cruiser 300, but it's much more modern and comfortable than the 76-Series station wagon.

The updated seven-seater Prado rides on a new chassis – the same as the Cruiser 300 – and its technologically advanced and luxurious interior rivals its Land Rover competitors: the Defender and Discovery.

The engine is the tried-and-tested 2.8-litre four-cylinder GD6 turbo-diesel that Toyota uses in a range of off-road vehicles (including certain Fortuners), but the real magic is in the eight-speed automatic gearbox. It's the secret behind the car's driving pleasure and fuel economy.

On the tarmac between Maputo and Ponta do Ouro, passing trucks and other slow traffic was easy – I never felt like power was lacking. The limited First Edition model (the one with round headlights that is already sold out) and the luxury VX-R model both also get a mechanism that locks the front anti-roll bar so there's less body roll at high speed.

Even though this is a big car with permanent four-wheel drive, fuel consumption on the open road was less than 8 ℓ/100 km. It's also the first Land Cruiser with electric power steering, which will make your search for parking at the mall much less stressful.

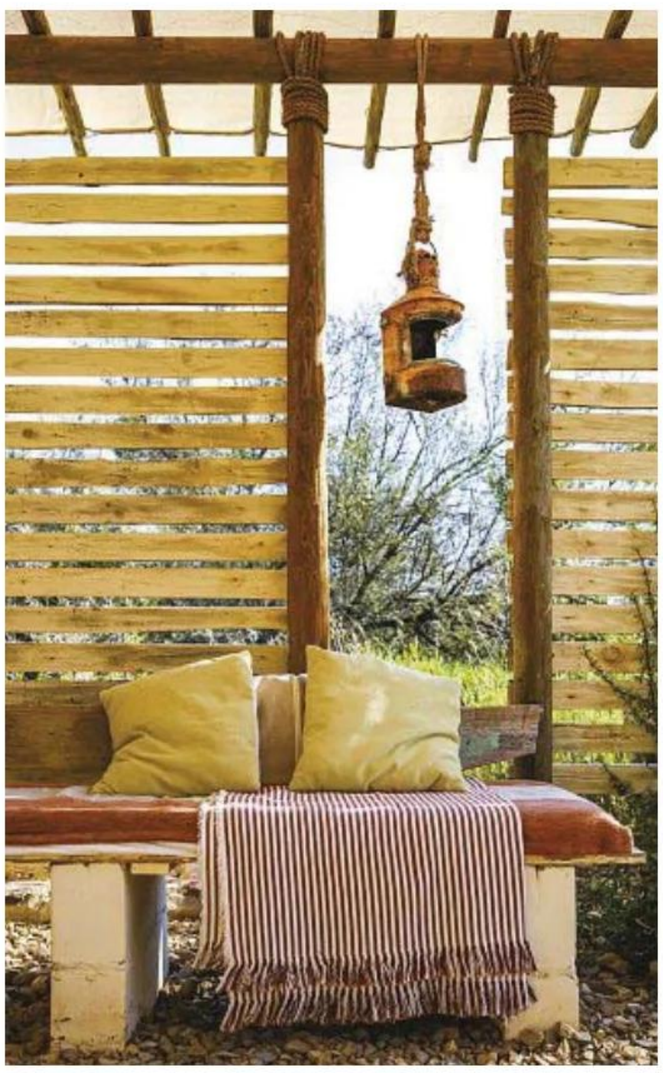
Of course, the Prado is far more than a suburban prancing horse. It's a proper off-roader with a body-on-frame construction, a newly developed independent double-wishbone suspension system at the front, and a four-link rigid axle at the rear. Depending on the driving conditions, you can adjust the steering, traction and brake control in high and low range at the push of a button, using the Multi-Terrain Select system. The front anti-roll bar that you kept locked on the tarmac can be unlocked using a switch on the centre console to extend the suspension travel by 10%. And if you really manage to get stuck in thick sand, the Prado has a crawl mode that you can use in low range to wiggle yourself free.

The design of previous Prados was not really a selling point, but Toyota has knocked it out of the park with this one. It's a shame that the old-school, round-light First Edition model had such a limited run, but personally I think the rectangular front lights of the "normal" model suit its boxy appearance even better. It's a car that turns heads for all the right reasons.

Even though the price is steep – the TX starts at R1,3 million and the VX-R costs R1,45 million – the waiting time for a new one is already longer than six months. Goldilocks has spoken!

TOYOTA LAND CRUISER PRADO TX	
Engine	2.8-litre four-cylinder turbo-diesel
Power	150 kW@ 3 000 to 3 400 r.p.m.
Torque	500 Nm@ 1 600 to 2 800 r.p.m
Transmission	eight-speed automatic
Fuel consumption (claimed)	7,9 ℓ/100 km
Fuel tank	110 ℓ (80 ℓ + 30 ℓ)
Ground clearance	216 mm
Service plan	9 services/90 000 km
Service intervals	1 year/10 000 km
Warranty	3 years/100 000 km
Price	R1 296 300











STAY HERE

THE PLACE, NEAR LADISMITH

Between the Swartberg in the north and the Langeberg in the south is a gorgeous landscape of low hills and ancient watercourses. It can be dry, but in a year of good rain the veld comes alive with wildflowers. Tucked away in the middle of it all is this wonderfully remote guest farm where you can say goodbye to the real world for a few days.

Lizelle van den Bergh and Joseph Krige are your hosts and each of their three cottages feels like a sanctuary. We stayed in Red Rock Cottage, at the base of a daisy-studded koppie. Stylishly furnished and decorated in soothing neutral colours, with a breeze wafting the curtains, it immediately felt like home. A loaf of Lizelle's home-baked olive-and-rosemary bread was waiting for us on the kitchen table.

"Everything we do is aimed at creating spaces – and places – where our guests can reconnect with themselves and their loved ones in nature," Lizelle says. "To that end, our units are wilder than what you'd find in suburbia, but they're comfortable and just a little bit luxurious."

The outside area is as peaceful as the inside spaces and you'll be sorely tempted to spend all your time there, braaiing, sipping wine and watching the clouds drift past, but you'd be missing out if you didn't walk down to the Touws River at sunset. The Touws runs through the property and it was full of water during our visit – special to see in the Karoo. If you enjoy cycling, there are amazing, quiet gravel roads in the district. The quirky town of Van Wyksdorp is about 36 km away – we rode there for lunch.

The Place is also a great base if you want to explore the wider Little Karoo. Seweweekspoort – that hallowed portal through the Swartberg – is nearby to the north, and Garcia's Pass to the south is an adventurous way to travel to Riversdale and the Garden Route.

Or just come and be inspired by Lizelle's creativity: Take a breath, hug someone, admire a tiny flower blooming from the dirt and return to normal life refreshed.

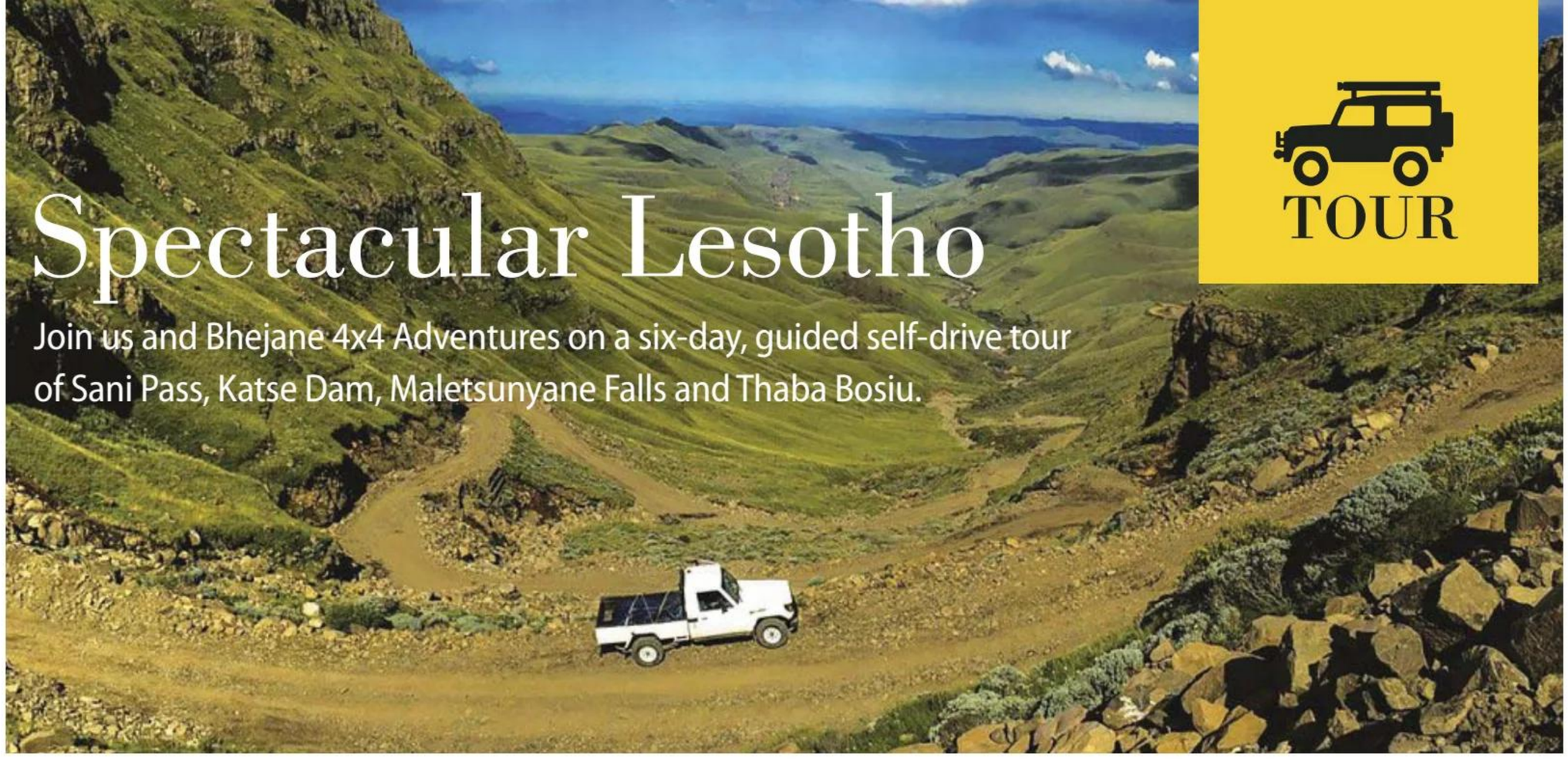
Facilities: There are three cottages: Red Rock (sleeps four), The Eye (sleeps two) and The Studio (sleeps four). They're spaced a fair distance apart and offer lots of privacy. Each cottage has a fully equipped kitchen for self-catering, a braai, and a fireplace for cold nights. The Eye has an outside shower (and an inside one) plus a cold-water plunge pool; The Studio also has a plunge pool. All three cottages have Wi-Fi.

Rates: Red Rock from R1 100 per night; The Studio from R950 per night for two people; The Eye from R1 300 per night. If you have small children, chat to Lizelle about extra bedding and special rates. Well-behaved pets are welcome: R50 per night. Home-baked bread from R40 per loaf; order in advance.

Where is it? The Place is about 30 km south of Ladismith via the R62 and R323 – you'll receive detailed directions when you book.

More info: the-place.co.za; 071 080 7333 (Lizelle)

– Jon Minster



Spectacular Lesotho

TOUR

Join us and Bhejane 4x4 Adventures on a six-day, guided self-drive tour of Sani Pass, Katse Dam, Maletsunyane Falls and Thaba Bosiu.

THE ITINERARY

DAY 1: SANI MOUNTAIN LODGE

Our adventure starts in Himeville, a town in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands. We meet at the Stone House Café.

We spend the rest of the day tackling the legendary Sani Pass. After clearing customs on the South African side, we have a picnic lunch and then slowly make our way up the pass. There will be more than enough time to enjoy the scenery and take pictures.

Our accommodation for the night is the cosy Sani Mountain Lodge. It feels like you're on top of the world at this lodge, which is built on the edge of the Drakensberg and affords stunning views into KwaZulu-Natal.

DAY 2: FICKSBURG

Our next overnight stop is in Ficksburg – our route will take us over the highest roads in southern Africa. We cross the Senqu River, which becomes the Orange River when it enters South Africa, and drive past the highest mines in southern Africa. Thanks to these mines, the road networks in the area have been upgraded, making our travels easier.

DAY 3: MOHALE LODGE

After a big breakfast, we do a guided tour of the Katse Dam wall and learn more about the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. We spend the rest of the day driving a circular route around the dam, with a picnic lunch along the way to Mohale Dam and our accommodation at Mohale Lodge.

DAY 4: RAMABANTA

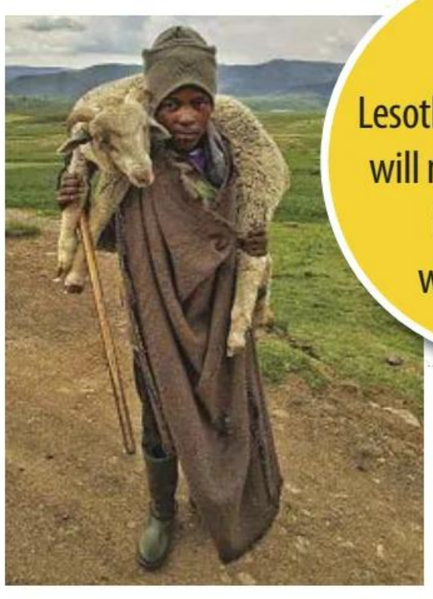
Today we traverse mountain passes with names like God Help Me and Blue Mountain. We will then visit Thaba Bosiu, a natural fortress where King Moshoeshoe, the founder of the Basotho people, took his young nation. They lived here for many years, protected from the Zulus, English and Boers. We will arrive in the small town of Ramabanta in the late afternoon and stay over at the Trading Post Lodge for two nights. You can look forward to delicious home-cooked food.

DAY 5: RAMABANTA

This will be an easy day. We'll visit Maletsunyane Falls at Semonkong, where the water drops 192 m down a cliff. After a picnic lunch, we return to the lodge to relax for the afternoon. There are some lovely walks in the area, and you can go horse riding.

DAY 6: DEPARTURE

After our last breakfast together, we make our way towards Maseru, but first we'll drive around Thaba Bosiu. Then we say our goodbyes at the visitor centre near the Maseru Bridge border post, and everyone goes their own way.



Please note. Lesotho border officials will not permit access into Lesotho without a 4x4!



Contact bookings@bhejane.com or call 082 724 0442 for a complete itinerary and a list of tour dates.

LESOTHO LANDMARKS

DATES AND RATES

14 – 19 February 2025

R18 550 per adult sharing; half-price for children under 10

Duration: Six days, five nights (lodge and guesthouse accommodation)

THE TEAM

Your tour leader is an experienced nature conservationist and adventure guide. He will be in radio contact with you at all times to impart a wealth of biological, cultural, historic and 4x4 knowledge.

INCLUDED IN THE RATE

- Lodge and guesthouse accommodation for five nights.
- Breakfast and supper at the guesthouses every day. During daily excursions, the Bhejane guide and his assistant will prepare picnic lunches for you.

WHAT YOU NEED TO BRING

- Your own 4x4 vehicle; fuel is for your account
- Valid passports and documentation (required at the border post)
- Money for border-crossing fees

Bhejane
FOLLOW ADVENTURE



TAKE A HIKE

KEEP CALM AND FOLLOW THE HOGS!

BY ESMA MARNEWICK

No matter how experienced you are as a hiker, it's always an unpleasant feeling when the map in your hand doesn't match the path in front of you. Even more so when dark clouds are gathering overhead…

This is the situation I found myself in as we walked through a forest near Hogsback in the Amatola Mountains. We wanted to get to Madonna and Child Falls – one of Hogsback's main attractions. But which of the three turn-offs was the one to take? And would the rain clear, like the YR weather app had promised?

We'd already hiked about 500 m and we hadn't seen any signs to confirm that we were on the right path. We *did* see a waterfall called Nomthunzi's Falls, even though it wasn't indicated on the map.

I should have just stayed calm, because minutes later I saw a sign with a bright red hog on it, and the rest of the trail was clearly marked. Also, you'll soon work out that you don't have to worry about getting lost in the forest around Hogsback because all the trails eventually lead back to Wolfridge Road or Main Road.

Unlike other rural towns, Hogsback's Main Road doesn't have the standard church and co-op. It's a potholed dirt track that runs past the SaveMor Spar, a shop selling cannabis products, a chocolaterie, and the tourism office. The rest of Hogsback is hidden behind high trees at the end of winding roads – the town is basically a collection of smallholdings against the Amatola escarpment.

The challenge for hikers here is an abundance of choice – there are at least 20 trails to explore. There are five waterfalls, the so-called "Big Tree", the Arboretum and even an eco-shrine. These landmarks and attractions are connected by a network of trails through the ancient Afromontane forest that surrounds the town. You can walk an easy 2 km route to Madonna and Child Falls and Bridal Veil Falls, or you can do a 10 km loop and see all five waterfalls.

On a cold winter's afternoon in June, my family and I decided on a 6 km loop that included Swallowtail, Bridal Veil and Madonna and Child Falls.

The hogs led us down a steep slope to Swallowtail Falls in the kloof below. The waterfall is named after the swallowtail butterfly, with its teardrop-shaped pennants on its wings; but to me the two white wisps called to mind the tail of a pin-tailed whydah.

We left the waterfall behind and the canopy grew so dense overhead that my phone's GPS could no longer follow the trail. We descended into the kloof, past fallen trees covered in moss, over wooden bridges and several streams flowing to the Tyume River and dam down in the valley.

Something rustled in the branches overhead – a samango monkey! These monkeys are listed as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species; they only occur in certain forests in South Africa around Magoebaskloof, Mariepskop, St Lucia and Hogsback.

You'll also notice noisy green birds high in the canopy – they're Cape parrots, the only parrot species endemic to South Africa. There are only about 2 000 birds left in the wild, scattered between patches of mist belt forest in KZN and the Eastern Cape. This particular forest is one of their last refuges.

Rain drizzled somewhere above the trees, but it was dry on the forest floor. Only the occasional

raindrop plopped through the leaves.

After 2 km, the trail levelled out and we walked along a wide path over leaf litter. It started to rain again. We made the executive decision to skip Bridal Veil Falls because we still had to walk 2 km along a forestry road back to our bakkie, without the shelter offered by the forest.

Past the turn-off to Bridal Veil, the trail started to climb a series of wooden bridges among white ironwood and wild plum trees. To a buzzard in flight, we must have looked like dassies as we ascended the kloof. In a small clearing, an outcrop protruded from a dark rock wall and water streamed down: Madonna and Child Falls.

Carved into a rock below the falls, two hands folded protectively around a child. We also saw some melted candlewax. It was full moon recently…

From the waterfall, we followed a set of steep wooden bridges to a plateau, where the trail joined up with Wolfridge Road. It was cold, but the rain was gone and the sun shone brightly.

I couldn't wait to follow the hogs into the forest again the next day.

Clockwise from far left: Wooden bridges help you up the steeper sections; Madonna and Child Falls; Swallowtail Falls; look for the red hog route markers; a rock engraving below Madonna and Child Falls.

Left: Wolfridge Road takes you back to Hogsback.

Where? This circular route starts next to Wolfridge Road, which runs past The Historic Hogsback Inn. Drive past the hotel until you see a place to park on the left. The trail begins on the opposite side of the road next to the grounds of the Hunterstoun Centre. Look for the Swallowtail sign.
Distance: It's a circular route of about 6 km. You can turn off to see the Big Tree and Bridal Veil Falls – doing so will add about another kilometre to the total distance.
Cost: Free, but get a map from the tourism office in Main Road for R20 – the funds are used to maintain the trails.
Contact: visithogsback.co.za

go!

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- PhotoPills – what's that?
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takebetterphotos.gomag.co.za

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

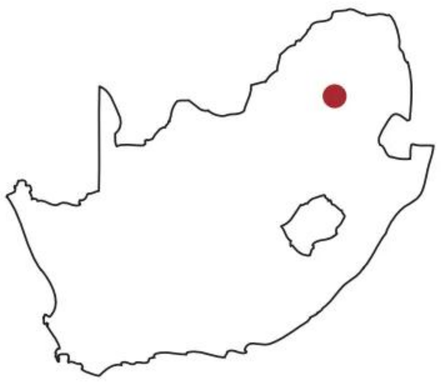
Thousand-carat Cullinan

Cullinan has a diamond-mining history, but these days this Gauteng escape has many other little gems to share with visitors. Here's what you need to know.

WORDS & PICTURES **MIA LOUW**

Oak Avenue is where the action is at: You'll find most of the town's restaurants, shops and tours here.





Opposite page, clockwise from top left: In spring, the jacaranda blossoms paint Oak Avenue purple. Guide Carol Waterston tells Hancu Louw more about the history of the Cullinan Mine. The mine is just as popular with the town's banded mongooses. For sheer thrills, whiz across Muningi Gorge on a zipline, 15 km north-east of Cullinan. If you prefer less of an adrenaline rush, watch game like zebra at Adventure Zone, also in Muningi Gorge. It gets quite busy at Premier Dairy in Oak Avenue on weekends.

It's surprisingly quiet for a Friday morning in a Gauteng mining town. Cape turtle-doves call from the jacaranda trees: "Work harder! Work harder!" Or, since it's the weekend: "Drink lager! Drink lager!" In the distance, air-conditioning units rumble at the Cullinan Mine. Then a group of motorbikes roars into town – *now* it feels like the weekend.

Cullinan is only about 40 km north-east of Pretoria. It's a popular weekend destination for the people of Gauteng, especially if you're into motorbikes and cars. During one of my previous visits, there were two motoring clubs visiting town: one group of AC Cobra petrolheads and another of Mercedes enthusiasts.

Classic cars driving past Victorian buildings make for a pretty picture, but it's just as fun to explore Cullinan on foot, especially in spring, when the jacarandas turn the town purple.

Stroll down Oak Avenue – the main road as far as activities, eateries and shops are concerned – and the town comes alive. Friends meet each other for brunch or a beer, a musician plays his guitar outside a restaurant, and strangers greet each other with a smile.

The town is named after a diamond, and the diamond is named after a man called Sir Thomas Cullinan. Born in what is now the Eastern Cape – back then the Cape Colony – Cullinan first came to Johannesburg in 1887 to work as a bricklayer. He turned to gold prospecting, but left that too in search of new adventures. That's the story Carol Waterston tells me – she moved to Cullinan in 2003 to open an art and gift shop; now she leads tours of the mine.

"Cullinan heard of a farm called Elandsfontein where there were rumours of diamonds," Carol says. "He was keen to investigate but didn't want to raise suspicions. The story goes that he told the farmer, a man called Willem Prinsloo, that one of his (Cullinan's) cows with anthrax had strayed over onto Prinsloo's farm. Prinsloo asked him to go look for the cow, shoot it and dig a hole to bury it. Cullinan dug a hole big enough for a whole herd of cattle and found the evidence he was looking for: blueish soil, which suggested that the land was very likely to contain diamonds."

Cullinan had to wait until after Prinsloo's passing in 1898 – and for the Anglo-Boer War to end – before he could do anything about his discovery. The Prinsloo family were desperate for money and Cullinan convinced the two sons, Willem Jr and Joachim, to sell him their land for £52 000.

In 1902, Cullinan discovered the kimberlite pipe he knew was there, and the same year he established the Premier Mine (now known as the Cullinan Mine) with Percival Tracey.

Three years later, the Premier Mine made international headlines when the biggest diamond in the world was discovered. The Cullinan diamond weighed a whopping 3 106 carats, or 621 g – as much as a large bottle of shampoo. It was eventually cut into nine pieces. The biggest two – the Great Star of Africa and the Second Star of Africa – were incorporated into the sceptre and crown of the British Crown Jewels.

On a surface tour of the mine, you can see a replica of the Cullinan diamond when it was still intact, plus life-sized replicas of the underground tunnels used by miners.

Carol leads our group to the top of a mineshaft that goes a kilometre into the earth, and we visit an open pit that's 500 m deep and a kilometre wide. She points out how one edge of the pit is inching closer to town because of landslides. "It's now only 100 m from one of the mineshafts," she says ominously...

At the end of the tour, the groups heads back to town. Before we leave the grounds, some creatures scurry through the dust-covered buildings – dozens of banded mongooses.

"The town's residents love them because they keep snakes out of their gardens," says Carol. She also tells us about the raptors in town – a spotted eagle-owl once caught one of her cats...

If a business of mongooses makes you crave some time in nature, you can visit Adventure Zone in Muningi Gorge, about 15 km north-east of Cullinan. "Muningi means kingfisher in Kwangali, a language from the Kavango region in Namibia," says Adventure Zone owner, Hanro Davel. "Look out for kingfishers – there are five species here – and pythons... There are leopards, servals, caracals and honey badgers in the gorge."

Hanro's family bought the farm encompassing Muningi Gorge 18 years ago. "It was once known as Die Grotte and it was a popular resort in the 1980s," he says. "You can still see some of the stone buildings along the hiking trails."

You can't spend the night here, but you can explore the gorge in several ways, including along a zipline. I decide to stay on firm ground


CULLINAN
DIAMONDS




SHH711 GP







DID YOU KNOW?

The word "carat" comes from the carob seed, which was historically used as a unit of measurement by gem traders. The origin of the word is rooted in the Greek word "*keration*", which means carob seed, and later passed into Arabic as "*qīrāṭ*".

and do the 5 km hike along the Elands River instead.

Voices echo as a group glides over the gorge. Our paths cross at the longest zipline cable, which is 570 m of pure adrenaline. A man laughs as he zips through the sky, a boy screams with his hands in the air, and an older woman giggles like a love-struck teenager.

Back on the trail, I walk past beautiful trees with nameplates: flame thorn, velvet bush willow, lavender fever berry... It's a hot day and I stop under each one for a breather.

Later in the afternoon, back at 117 on Oak – the guesthouse where I'm staying – Heindrich (7) and Mialize (5) Pistorius ride their scooters in the garden. Their parents, the owners of 117 on Oak, are Lize-Mari and Jacques. They moved to Cullinan in 2018 so Jacques could work at the mine and they could live a country lifestyle. But then Jacques got a new job in Rosebank, Joburg, this year. It was either move to the city or stay in Cullinan. They chose Cullinan, and Jacques does the 180 km commute on the Gautrain.

"We did consider moving, but we couldn't give up the space we have here – and the feeling of safety," says Lize-Mari. "On Sundays we sit outside our yard and watch as the kids ride their bikes in Oak Avenue. We often walk to the Spar together."

It's true: There's a vibe in Cullinan. I follow Lize-Mari's advice and walk to the Spar to buy a cooldrink. As I cross the road, two young men stick their heads out of the window of their Volkswagen Golf and shout "*aweh*!" as if we've known each other for years.



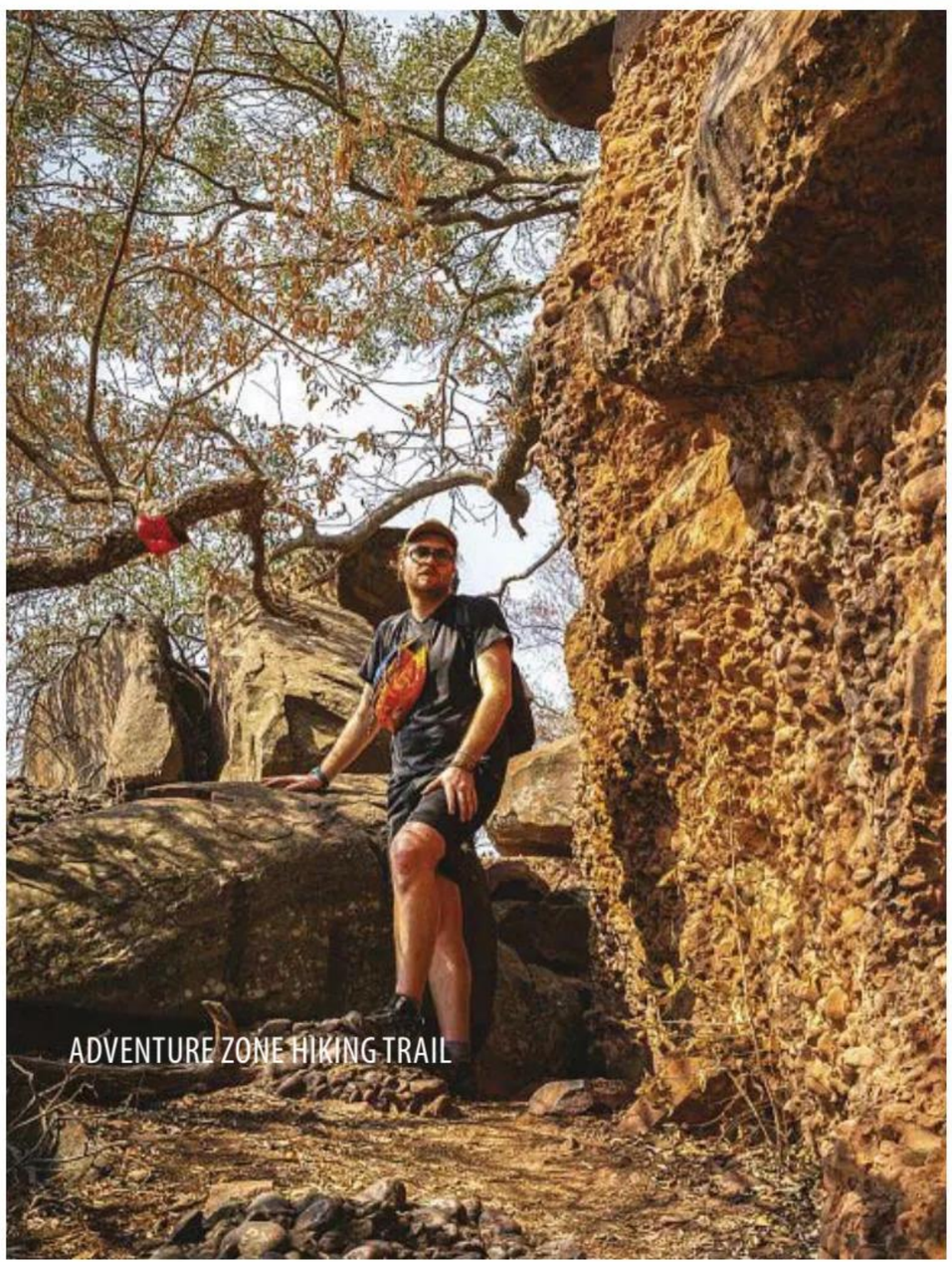
MCHARDY HOUSE MUSEUM



MINE TOUR

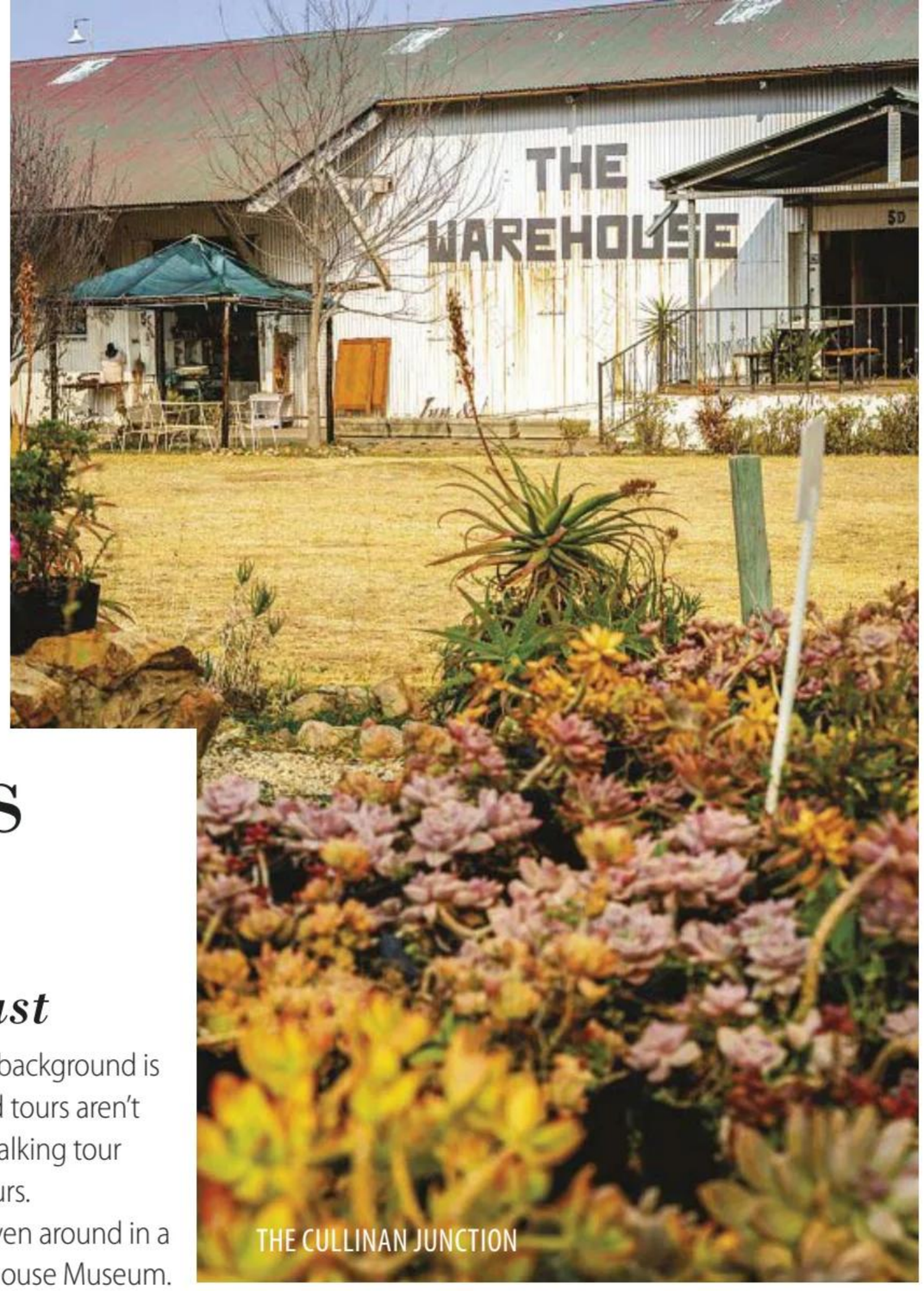


AC Cobra motoring enthusiasts gather outside the Cullinan Junction centre.

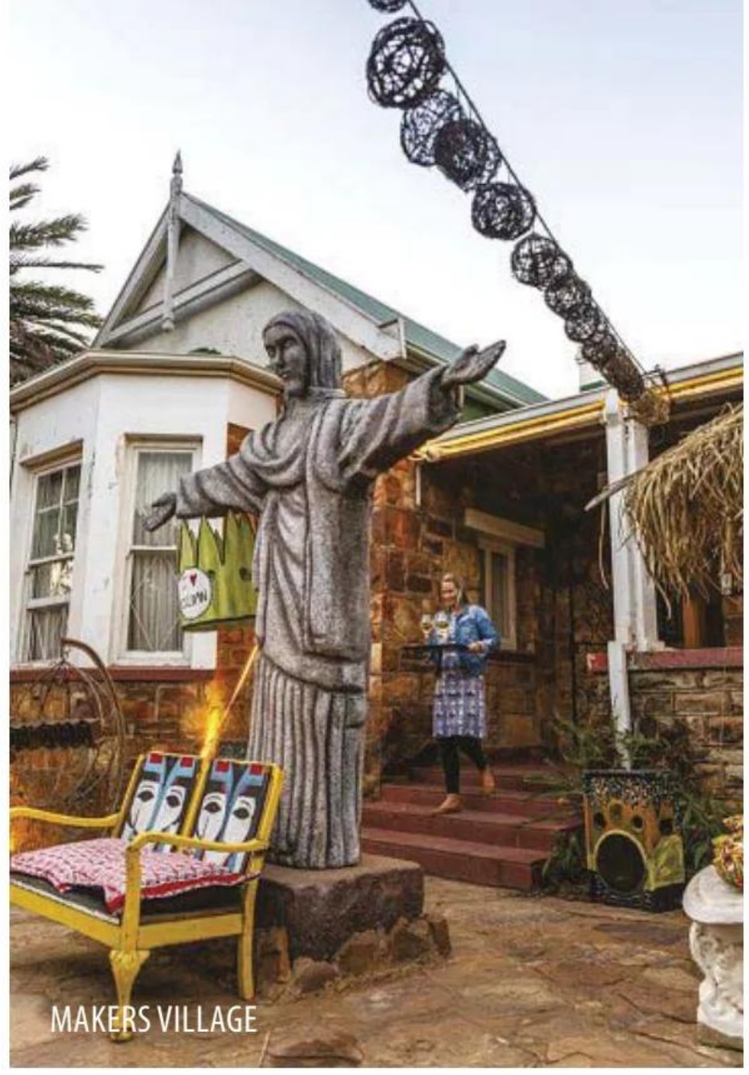


ADVENTURE ZONE HIKING TRAIL





THE CULLINAN JUNCTION


MAKERS VILLAGE

3 Things to do

1 Delve into the past



The best way to understand Cullinan's background is to go on a mine tour. The underground tours aren't currently available, but you can do a walking tour above ground – it takes about two hours.

There's also a tour where you're driven around in a vehicle, which includes the McHardy House Museum. This was the first house built at the Premier Mine in 1903. William McHardy was the first manager of the mine and his two daughters lived in the house until they passed away in 1984. The mine bought the house and turned it into a museum.

Cost: Walking tour R180 per person; motorized tour R250 per person; McHardy House Museum R50 per person.

Opening times: The Cullinan tourism office is open Tuesday to Sunday from 9 am to 4.30 pm. It's closed on Mondays, but you can book beforehand if you'd like to do a tour then.

Where? Seringa Street, opposite the McHardy House Museum in Oak Avenue.

Contact: ✆ 071 683 9180; "Cullinan tourism and history" on Facebook

2 Get your adrenaline fix



Adventure Zone offers a variety of fun activities, including three hiking trails (with river pools to swim in along the way), abseiling, ziplining and quad-bike safaris in Muningi Gorge.

The zipline has four cables and is 1,5 km in total. According to a Blue Bulls rugby player who recently did the zipline, he reached a top speed of 120 km/h…

Cost: Hiking R120 per person; zipline R720 per person.

Opening times: Daily from 8 am to 5 pm; until 3 pm on Sundays. Booking is essential – contact Adventure Zone or the Cullinan tourism office.

Where? Muningi Gorge is about 15 km outside town.

Contact: ✆ 012 734 0507; adventurezone.co.za

3 Stock up on gifts

Bring your fabric bags and get started on Christmas shopping – you'll find something for everyone (and their dog) in Cullinan. Most of the shops are in Oak Avenue, or a 600 m walk further in the Cullinan Junction centre.

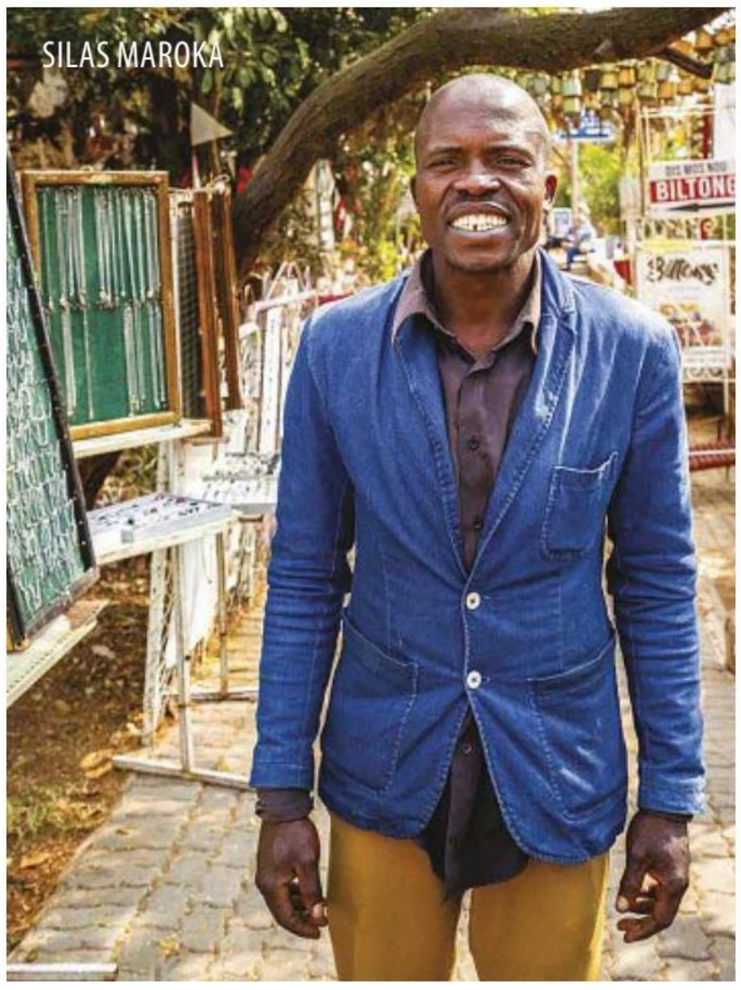
Makers Village (✆ 074 674 4235) is a creative space that consists of a restaurant, bar, art gallery, gift shop and several studios where a ceramic artist, jeweller, woodworker and blacksmith work their magic. The yard is decorated with colourful furniture, art and sculptures.

At **Rust in White** (✆ 082 255 2465) you can find antique furniture, rusty farm gates, enamelware, second-hand clothes and quilts. They have everything from classic white décor to plates decorated with flowers. Even if you don't want to buy anything, wander from room to room – it's like Pinterest in real life!

The **Cullinan Junction** shops will make a dent in your wallet. At **Mercia's Arts & Crafts** (✆ 062 682 6291) you can buy artwork, crocheted children's clothes and boer soap. **Beatus Gifts and Crafts** (✆ 084 224 9263) sells baby products, cushions, décor and leather handbags. **Heart of Stone** (✆ 079 963 9349) has jewellery and precious stones. At **Granni Canni's Kitchen** (✆ 081 798 2244) you can pick up seeds and tools for your garden, as well as cannabidiol products for people, cats and dogs. Say hi to Gavin Badenhorst and his dog Dexter when you get a plant from the **Junction Nursery** (✆ 073 187 1315).

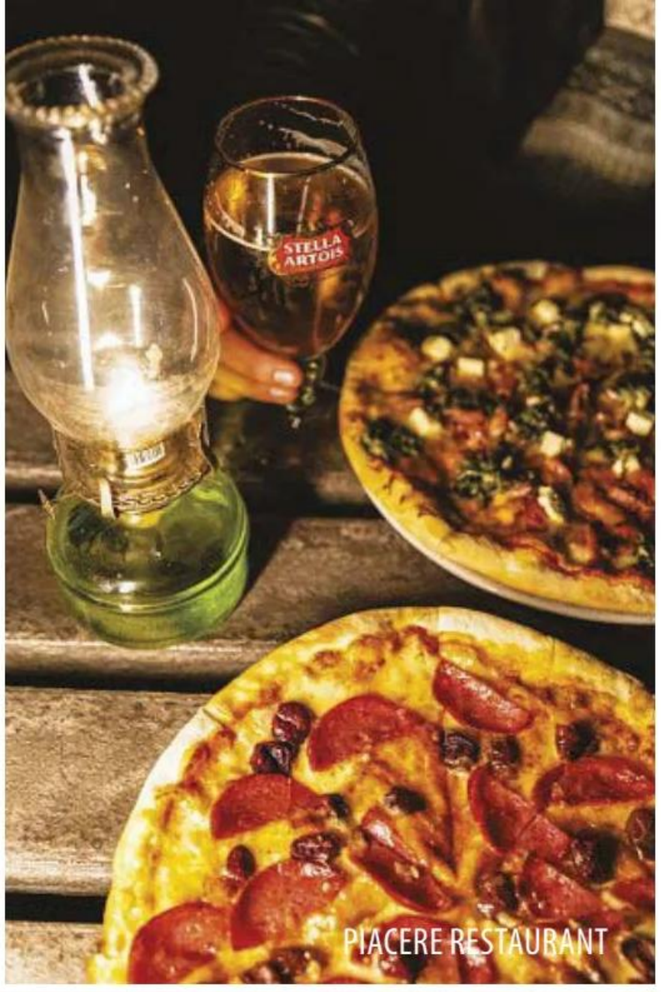
Forgot your sunglasses at home? **Silas Maroka** (✆ 082 222 8156) sells sunglasses, hats and jewellery on the pavement next to the As Greek As It Gets restaurant.



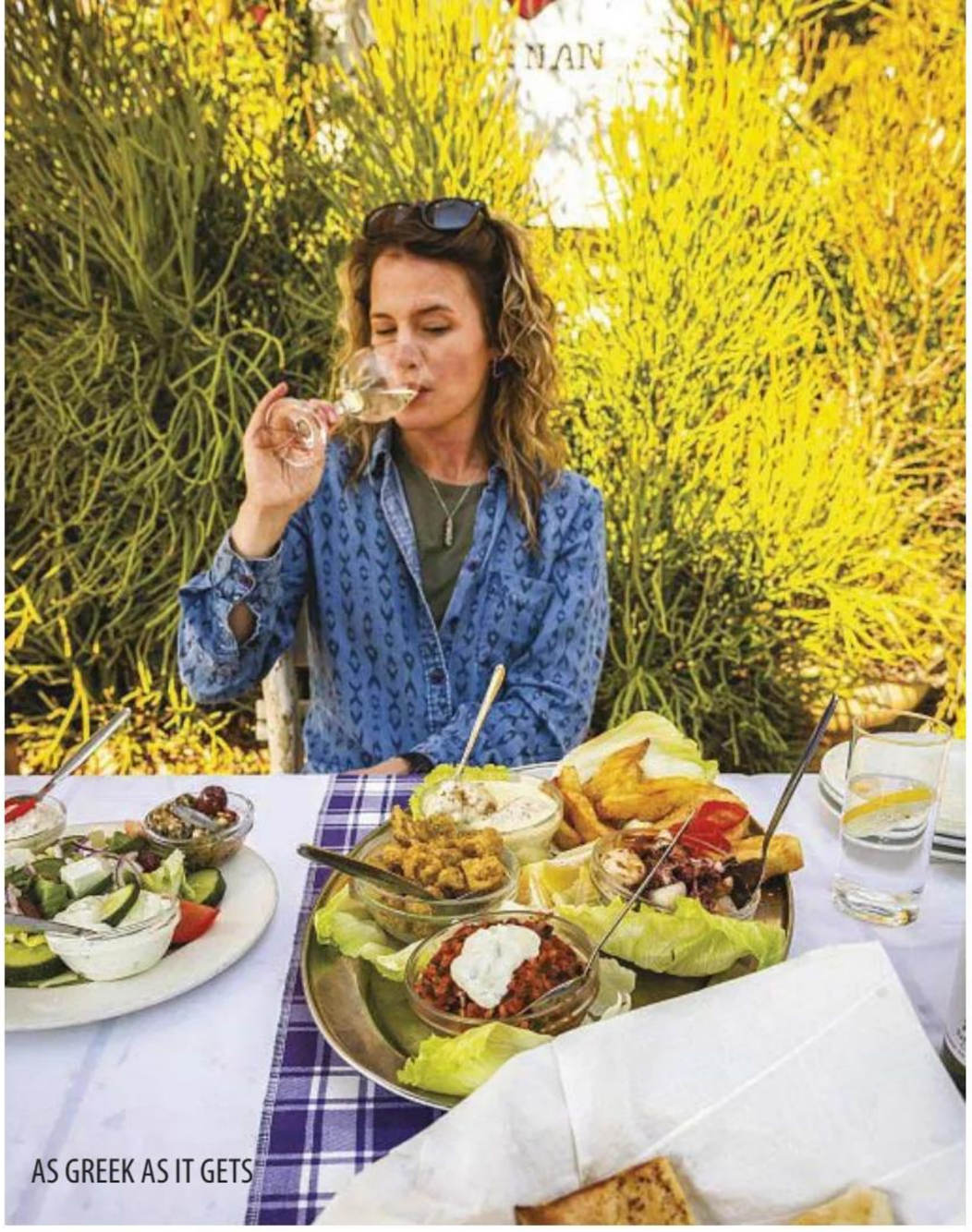




PIACERE RESTAURANT



PIACERE RESTAURANT



AS GREEK AS IT GETS



OPPISTASIE

EAT HERE

Piacere Restaurant

This Italian restaurant has delicious wood-fired pizzas, fresh salads, a kids' playground and a view of the golf course. It stays open later than other eateries in town. We ate there twice in one weekend. Prices range from R84 for a margherita to R200 for a seafood pizza.

Opening times: Sunday to Tuesday from 7 am to 7 pm; Wednesday to Saturday until 9 pm.

Where? 1 Main Road, at the Cullinan Golf Club

Contact: 012 734 0090

As Greek As It Gets

The white stone walls, blue shutters and Mediterranean décor will make you feel like you're on Santorini. This is a restaurant for special occasions because Stavros Vladislavic's cooking skills come at a price. A platter with pita, salad, tzatziki, pesto, potato wedges, spinach rice and four meze dishes of your choice costs R470 for two people. We ordered haloumi, calamari, crumbed mushrooms and chicken bourekia. Yum!

Opening times: Monday, Thursday and Friday from 10.30 am to 3.30 pm; Saturday and Sunday from 8.30 am to 4 pm. Closed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

Where? 86 Oak Avenue

Contact: 083 632 5364; asgreekasitgetscullinan.co.za

Oppistasie

This restaurant is in the old train station. Have breakfast before you go shopping at the Cullinan Junction. There's usually a musician performing on weekends. It's great value for money. A burger and draught beer costs R65; the Garrison breakfast (two eggs, three strips of bacon, a cheese griller, hashbrown and tomato on toast) is R75. Some dishes are served on spades!

Opening times: Monday to Saturday from 8 am to 8 pm; Sundays until 5 pm.

Where? 4 Hotel Street, Cullinan Junction

Contact: 078 326 7920

IN OTHER WORDS

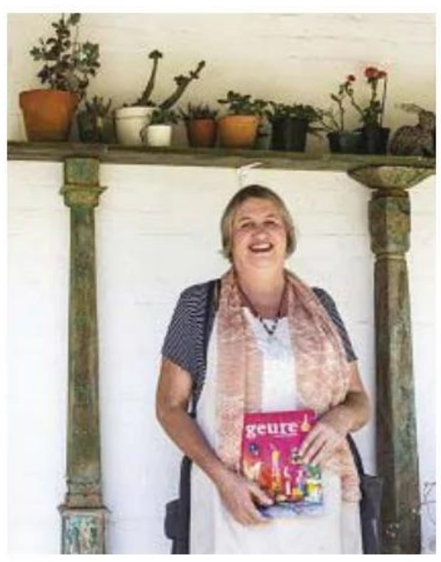
Lize-Mari Pistorius, guesthouse owner

"Die Pienk Koei, also known as Du Plooy Melkery, near Rayton is about 14 km from Cullinan and they make the most delicious pies. I recommend the curried mince pie (R25)."

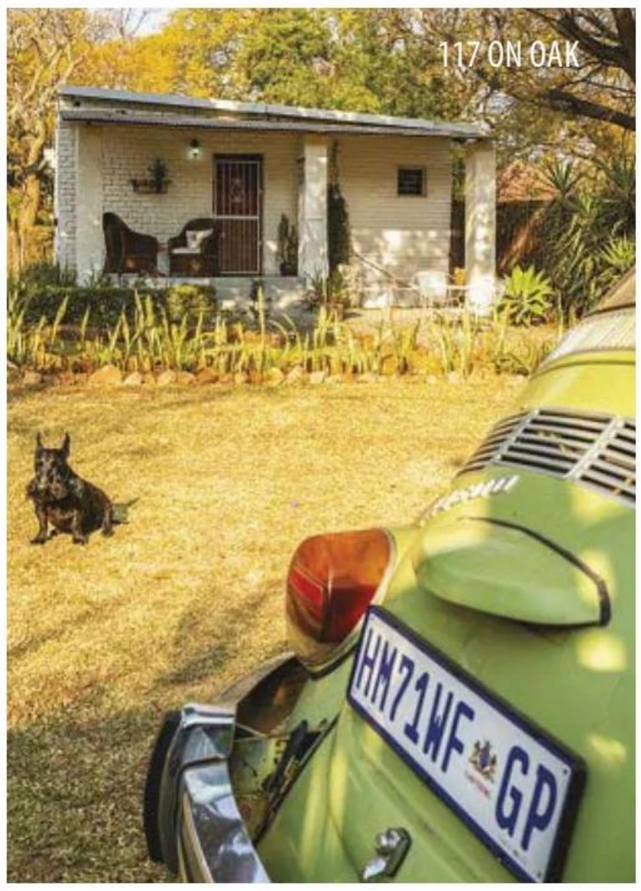


Lientjie Wessels, chef and artist

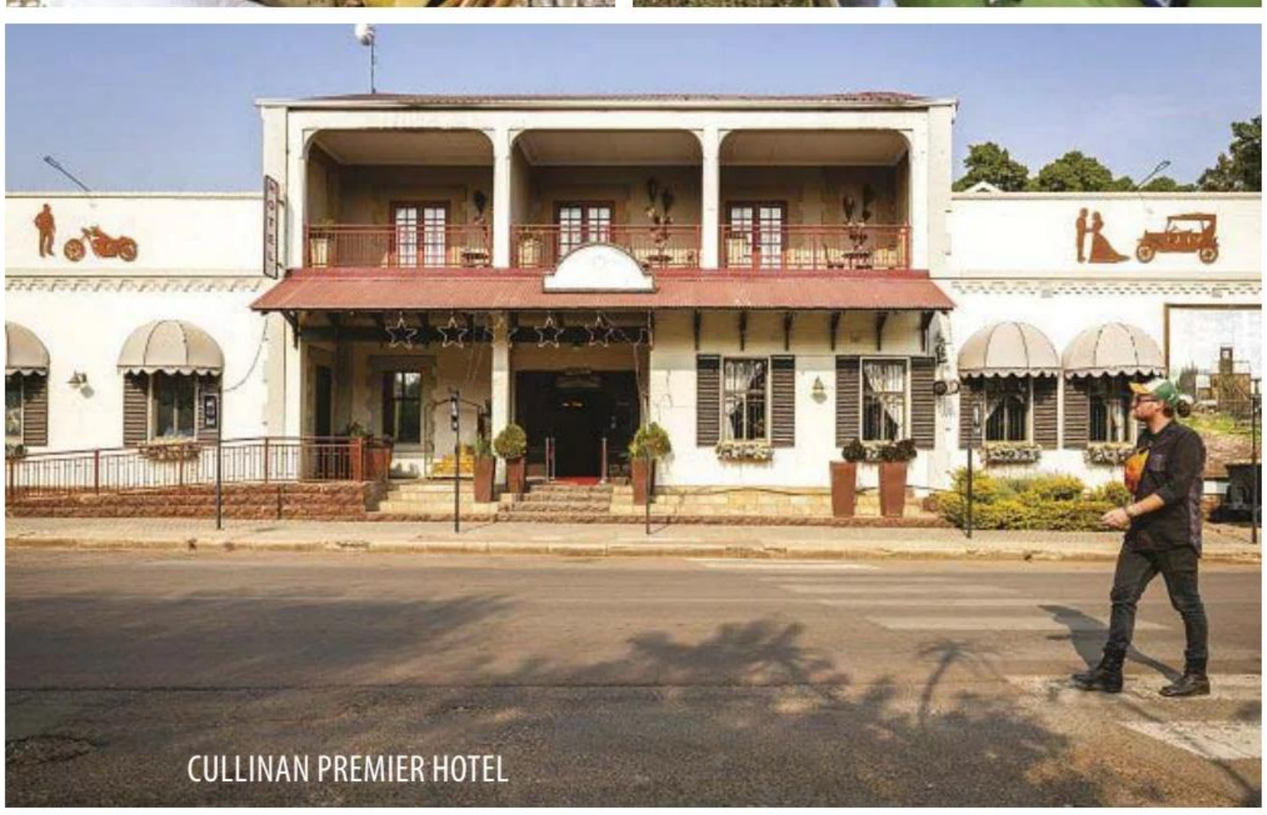
"Have a meal at The Hive in the hall at St George's church. The food is delicious and the buildings were designed by Sir Herbert Baker. Ghost tours hosted by Mark Rose-Christie also start here. Visit mysteryghostproductions.co.za to see when the next tour in Cullinan will take place."



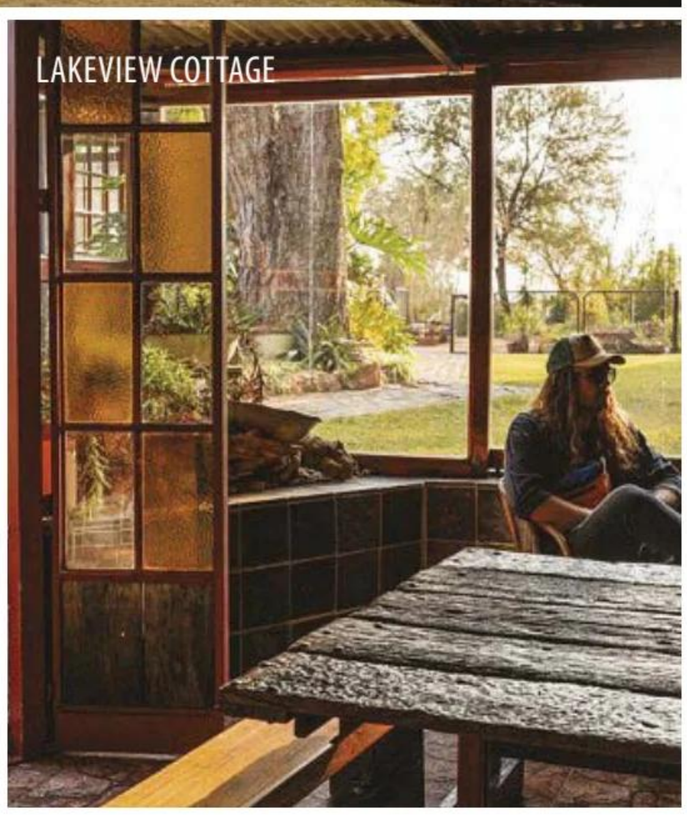












STAY HERE

117 on Oak
Two stylishly decorated twin-sleeper units in a big garden, close to all the attractions in Oak Avenue and Hotel Street. Owner Lize-Mari Pistorius has an eye for detail. Just look at the little sticker on the filter coffee bag… Yup, it's a Scottish terrier. The Pistorius family has two Scotties that play in the garden and love to welcome guests.
Rates: From R950 per night for two people; R100 for a breakfast basket for two.
Where? 117 Oak Avenue
Contact: ✆ 082 334 5512

Cullinan Premier Hotel
Overnight in a hotel from the early 1900s. There's a restaurant on site, a spa, and an underground wine cellar you can rent for special occasions. Do you like a party? The hotel is lively on a Saturday night.
Rate: From R600 per person sharing, with breakfast.
Where? 1 Hotel Street
Contact: ✆ 012 734 1810
🖱 cullinanpremierhotel.co.za

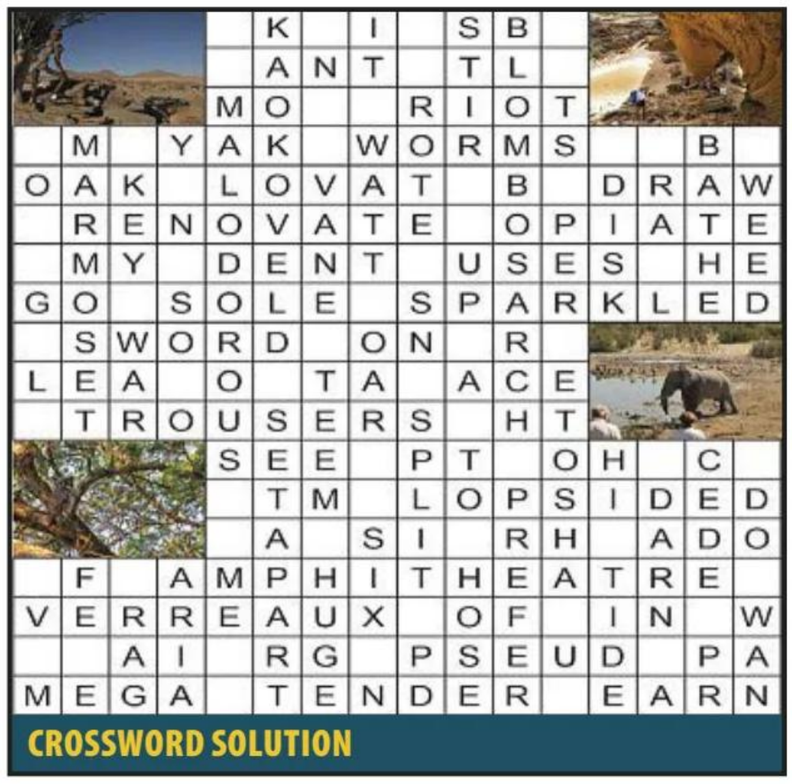
Lakeview Cottage
The two spacious self-catering houses here share a garden with the Zau Spa. One house sleeps six people in three bedrooms; the other sleeps ten in four bedrooms. You'll probably spend most of your time in the sunroom or next to the braai overlooking the garden and dam.
Rate: R410 per person sharing.
Where? Baobab Avenue
Contact: ✆ 079 506 3517
What else? There are half-day and full-day packages at Zau Spa on offer, from R1 170 per person. The half-day option includes a full-body Swedish massage, a hot drink and a slice of cake.
✆ 073 364 6846; 🖱 zauspa.co.za

Somabula Nature Reserve
Antelope, caracals and even leopards roam this little 4 km² reserve. The Outspan camp has four renovated ox-wagons around a communal lapa, with a living area, kitchen and bathrooms. A wagon called Ballantine is set apart from the rest, with its own kitchen and bathroom.

There are also seven chalets and six camping stands. Egret is the most private (and the most popular) camping stand.

Somabula isn't connected to the Eskom grid, but the chalets, ox-wagons and private stands have gas geysers and solar-powered lights. The bigger campsites only have gas geysers.
Rates: Ox-wagons and chalets from R450 per person. Campsite with communal ablutions R180 per person (six people per stand). Campsite with private ablutions: extra R100 per day. Day visitors are welcome but you have to book beforehand: R50 per person and R100 per day to use the braai lapa at the dam (maximum 10 people).
Where? 8 km south Cullinan
Contact: ✆ 082 550 1892

go! &BUY GUIDE



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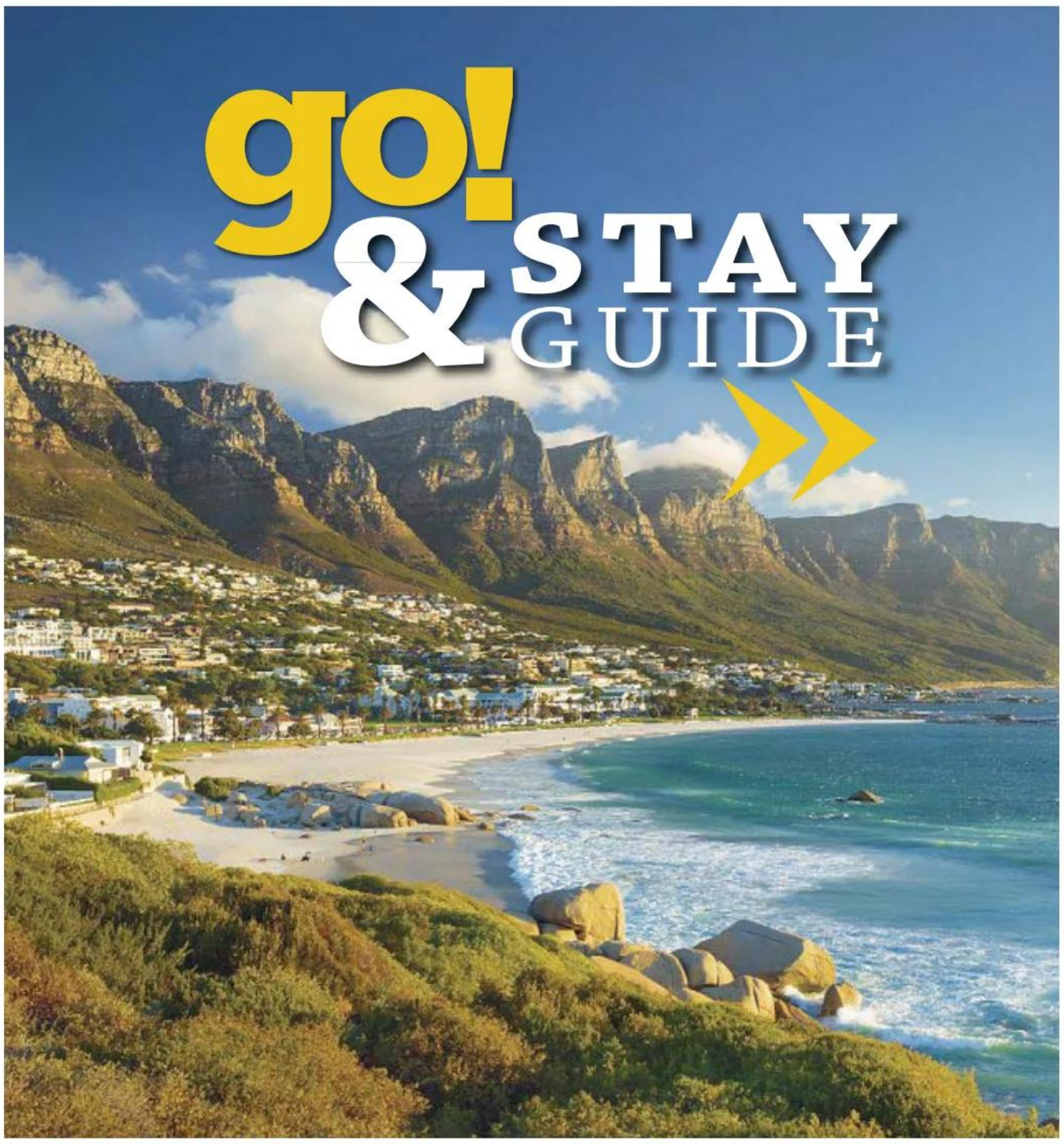
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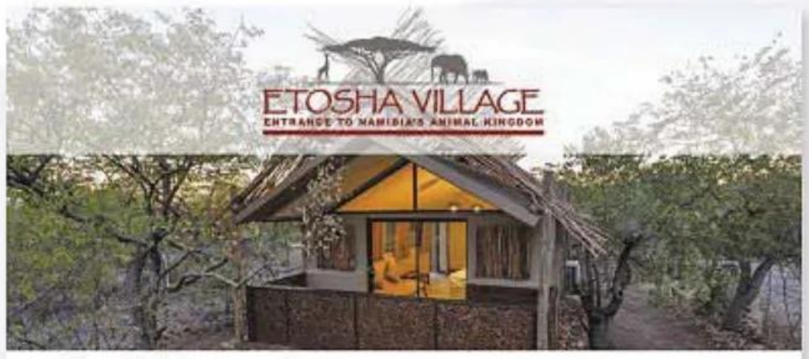
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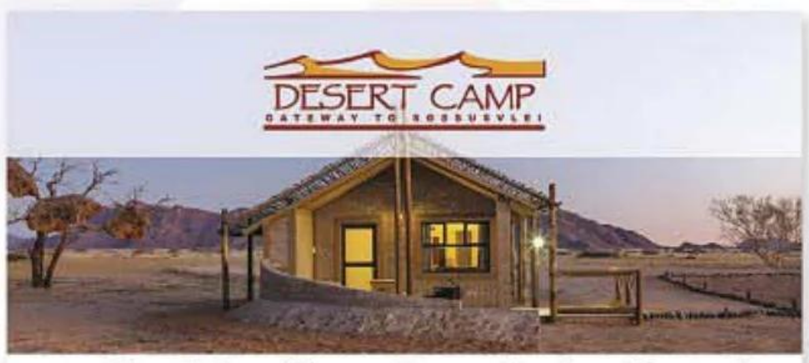
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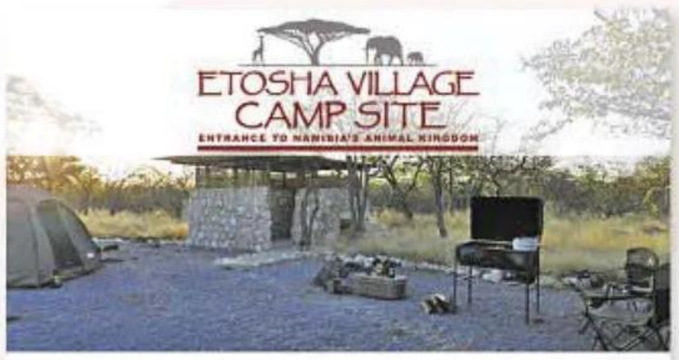
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WITH MY OWN EYES



1



For **Graadjie Small** and her husband Jan, the Pilanesberg Game Reserve is their happy place. They visit often, but this moment was extra special.

Jan and I love the Pilanesberg. It's close to our home in Centurion and we try to spend a weekend there every second month. We usually stay at Kwa Maritane Bush Lodge or – as we did in May 2024 – at Bakubung Bush Lodge.

It was late afternoon and almost time for the gates to close, but on the way back to Bakubung we pulled over at Lengau Dam to see if any animals were grabbing a drink before bedtime.

We were in luck: Elephants were spread all along the shore. There were cows with calves wherever I looked! I took photos with my Canon EOS R3 camera and Canon RF 150 – 500 mm zoom lens.

Then Jan noticed lions… They were hiding in the grass right behind the elephants. We could see three of them; just their faces were visible, and only if you knew where to look. **1**

Suddenly, one young elephant picked up the lions' scent. It trumpeted and flapped its ears. **2** The cows gathered the calves together and stood around them to protect them. **3**

The lions tried to lie even lower in the grass, but the elephants were kicking up a racket so the predators eventually – and reluctantly – moved up a hill. You think of lions as the bosses of the bush, but they quickly gave up when faced with an angry group of elephant cows. **4**

It was a beautiful sighting – two of the Big Five in one photo. Afterwards, the elephants walked towards us on the tar road in a tight group and I could get a farewell shot. **5**

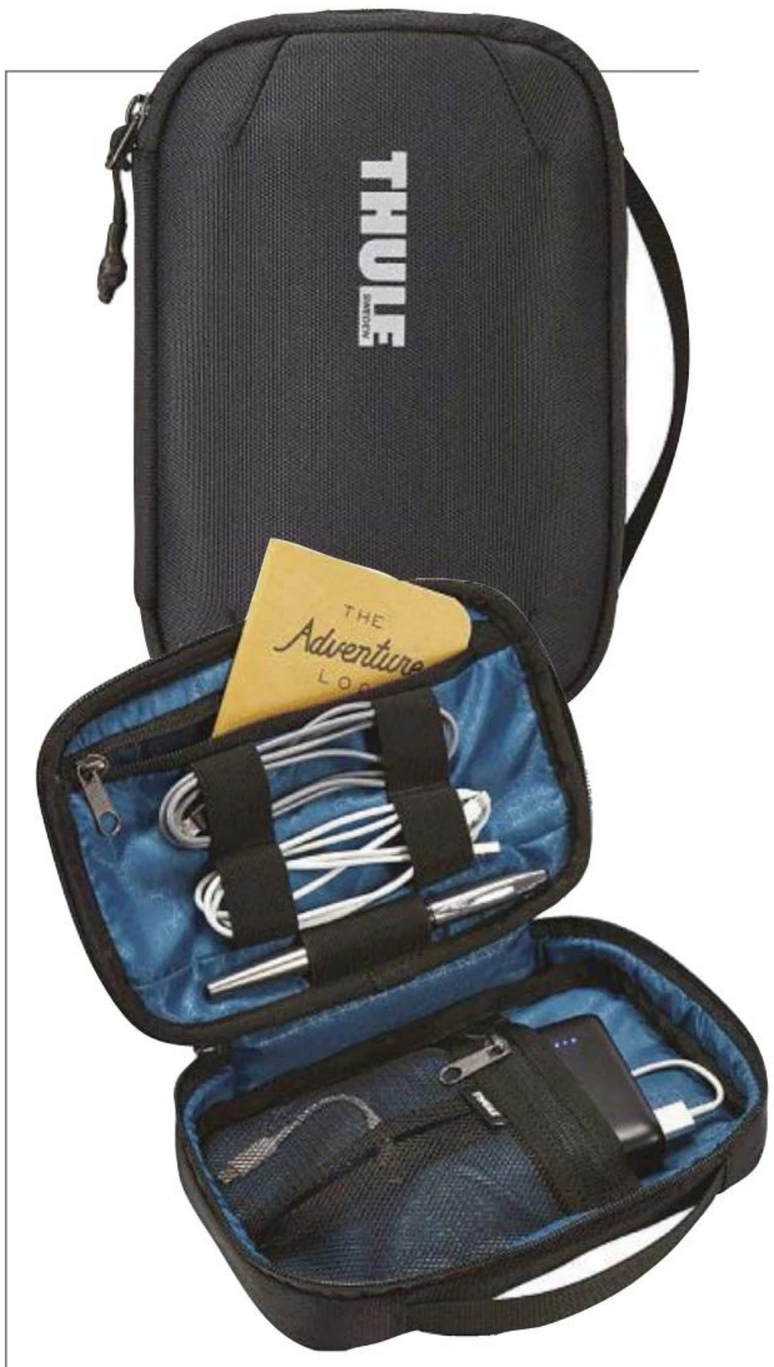
Thanks, Pilanesberg!











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Sharpen your Spidey sense!

Are you scared of spiders? Don't be… Only a few of them are actually dangerous, and some of them are really beautiful and interesting.

COMPILED BY **SOPHIA VAN TAAK**

How does a spider make silk?

Spiders spin webs to live in or to use as nets to catch prey. Every spider species has a different kind of web. But before it can spin a web, the spider has to produce the silk inside its body. The silk consists of protein, which the spider has to get from its food – that's why it hunts insects, geckos and other creatures.

The digested protein is mixed with acids secreted by glands to form a gel. The spider uses an organ called a spinneret on its abdomen to squeeze the gel out in long, sticky, elastic threads. The silk is very light, but very strong!

What's the difference between arachnids and insects?

Spiders are part of a family of critters called arachnids, along with scorpions, ticks, mites and a few others. Here's how arachnids differ from insects.

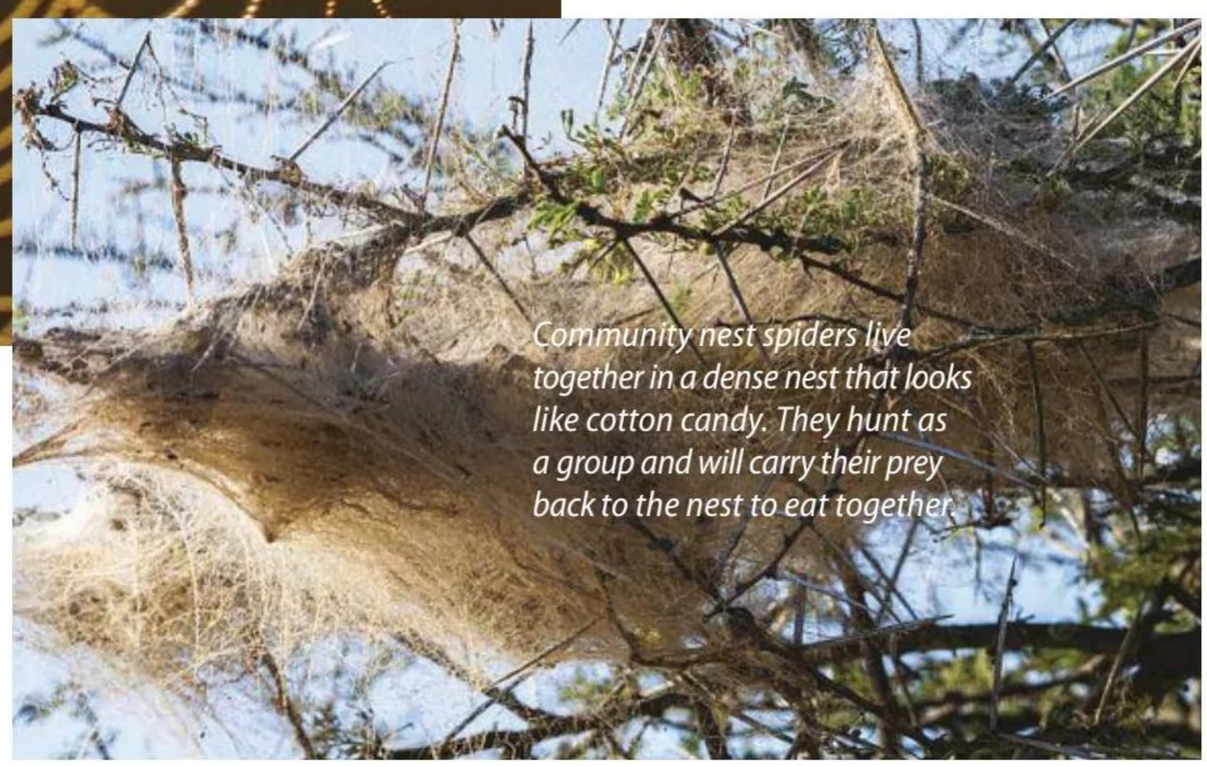
ARACHNIDS	INSECTS
The body consists of two parts: cephalothorax (fused head and thorax) and abdomen.	The body consists of three parts: head, thorax and abdomen.
Eight legs	Six legs
No wings. (Imagine how scary a baboon spider would be if it could fly!)	Most insects have wings.
No antennae	Antennae
Young spiders look exactly like the adults, only smaller. They moult as they grow.	Young insects are usually larvae and don't look like adult insects.



The garden orb-web spider makes a circular web of up to 75 cm in diameter (about two rulers!) with a thicker zigzag pattern (called a stabilimentum) in the middle of the web to strengthen it.



The net-casting spider looks like a twig when it sits still. But it can quickly catch prey by throwing a small web over it!



Community nest spiders live together in a dense nest that looks like cotton candy. They hunt as a group and will carry their prey back to the nest to eat together.

WHICH ONES ARE DANGEROUS?

There are several spider species in South Africa that might give you a fright, but only a few have dangerous venom.

NEUROTOXIC VENOM
damages the nervous system. You'll become nauseous and struggle to breathe.

CYTOTOXIC VENOM
damages the tissue around the bite mark.

The venom of the **black button spider** is neurotoxic and so strong you'll have to go to hospital if one bites you. The spider has a shiny black body and black legs, and its third pair of legs is much shorter than the rest. There are sometimes red marks on the back or top of its abdomen.

Black button spiders hunt beetles and geckos. They spin a round egg sac as big as a pea.



The **violin spider** looks like a daddy-long-legs. It's light brown or grey and sometimes has a dark pattern that looks like a violin on its cephalothorax. But the kind found in South Africa is more easily identified by the rust-brown or dark-brown spots on its abdomen.

A violin spider has tiny fangs and hunts fish moths. Sometimes you won't even feel its bite, but its venom is cytotoxic and can form a painful abscess.



JOHAN MARAIS

The **brown button spider** is sometimes light brown in colour, but can also be dark brown or even black. You can identify it by the orange-red hourglass shape under its abdomen. It also has light yellow markings on top of its abdomen.

This spider hunts insects and the female lays her eggs in a spiky egg sac. Their venom is also neurotoxic, but not deadly – it's only about 25% as strong as the venom of the black button spider.



The **long-legged sac spider** gets its name from the sac it builds to hide its eggs, often on the underside of a leaf. The cream-coloured spider has black mouth parts.

It's an aggressive hunter that leaps onto insects. If it leaps onto you, it might bite you and its cytotoxic venom can give you a fever and headache. The bite mark can take a long time to heal.



The **six-eyed sand spider** is the colour of sand and has a flat body. Its legs are covered in fine, brown hairs. The spider hides under sand and surprises insects that walk over it.

It has a very strong cytotoxic venom.



ALAMY.COM/ZA; GETTY/GALLOIMAGES.COM

The **baboon spider** is big, hairy and light brown to black in colour. It has thick legs, with two toes on each foot. This spider will hunt anything it can kill, from insects to small reptiles and even mice. Its venom is only moderately toxic, but its bite is very painful!



JOHAN MARAIS

DO YOU KNOW THESE SPIDERS?



The crab spider is tiny but beautifully coloured. It uses these colours to camouflage itself among flowers or leaves.



A jumping spider is also very small. It has a friendly, hairy face and two of its eyes stand out. It can leap up to 30 cm.



No other spider looks like the kite spider with its colourful spines!

Sources: livescience.com; africansnakebiteinstitute.com; *First Field Guide to Spiders & Scorpions of Southern Africa*

BIRDS

BY FAANSIE PEACOCK

THE JOYS OF A BIRD HIDE

VILLIERS STEYN

My dad was planting trees once and he got a bit overenthusiastic, digging a few more holes than were required. But I had a use for them.

I wriggled into one until my eyes were at ground level. My wife Ronél covered me with shade netting and sprinkled bird seed around me. I only had to wait a few minutes before the red-billed queleas descended. Thousands of them. They were so close I could hear their bills scraping and clicking as they ate the seeds. And every time they got a fright, the whole flock would fly up as one, their beating wings blowing empty seed pods into my face. I didn't have a camera or sound recorder; it was just for the fun of it. That was the best bird hide I've ever been in.

That's the thing with hides: Some are a waste of time; others are amazing.

On Bird Island near Lambert's Bay, you can watch thousands of Cape gannets through one-way glass. In Witsand – a Kalahari reserve in the Northern Cape – hordes of double-banded sandgrouse come to drink after sunset. And at the new Mzimkulu hide in the Southern Drakensberg, you can sit in an ergonomic office chair and watch bearded vultures choke down bones just a few metres away.

Bird hides don't always have a long lifespan. Many burn down; some sink into the mud; others simply rot away. There used to be a hide in the West Coast National Park that was sunk into the ground so you could watch birds at eye level. You just had to move a few puff adders out of the way first! In Barberspan Nature Reserve in North West, there were hides on wheels that you could move closer to the water.

I've seen wonderful things from bird hides. Rare things like a lesser yellowlegs (I was squeezed in with about 600 other birders), and beautiful things like two malachite kingfishers courting each other. Also ordinary things, like an African darter that was so close I could see the detail on each of its tail feathers.

But often it's what you observe *inside* a hide that's much more interesting. You carefully step over the threshold and do a quick scan to see if there's someone there. Sometimes you think you're alone but when your eyes adjust to the darkness, you notice a man in the furthest corner. You give a respectful greeting and go sit as far away as possible.

Then the detective work begins. *Bogger*

the birds – you're looking at the birders! Do they know their stuff? You can get an idea by "scoping" out their gear. That guy with the long lens is serious. And the couple with the affordable pair of binoculars is just here to see the flamingos. That guy scribbling away in his notebook – what did he see?

It usually only takes a minute or two to break the cardinal rule of "silence please". Normally, it's because you've seen something rare – you want to share that with other people, right? Or maybe it's a difficult identification and you need a second opinion. Or something so rare you need a witness. The rarer the bird, the less important the silence becomes. The hide will burst into activity as everyone shifts around to find the best position, reach for their cameras and help others to see what they're pointing at. And you know something really special is going on when the quiet guy with his eye stuck to the spotting scope suddenly lets out a string of curse words!

When there's nothing to see, a bird hide is an excellent place to make friends. An innocent question like, "Have you seen something interesting?" can spark a conversation. Before long you'll know all about your fellow birders' holiday plans, life lists, favourite stakeouts and the highlights of their visit to the Kruger Park last year.

You'll also find out that you have many birding acquaintances in common. It's a tight-knit community.

Other, uhm, "adventures" have also been known to take place in hides. You're in a remote, dark place and the animals and birds might be absent… That's why I like to cough politely a few times before I walk into a hide. Just in case.

How many hours have you spent on wooden benches in bird hides? More than on the pews of a church? What a joy a bird hide can be! That narrow slot you look through becomes your whole world, and you think of nothing else. You might even see a bird – but that's not the most important thing.

BIRD BRAIN



DYLAN VASAPOLLI

Where to start with this little bird? Often the best first clue is to look at its bill. In this case, it's fairly thin and flat – nothing special. It's adapted to a diet of insects so you can eliminate seedeaters. If you look at the branch it's perched on, you can tell that it's quite small, about the size of a sparrow or even smaller.

Like a white-eye? A white-eye wouldn't be a bad guess, but a white-eye's back is greener and it has a dark brown eye with a ring of white feathers around it. This bird has a lighter, yellow-white eye with a thin red ring around it.

Maybe it's one of the cisticolas or warblers? You're getting warmer! Now that you have a shortlist, you can turn to your guidebook or app. There aren't many species with a combination of yellow, green and grey plumage. The yellow-throated woodland warbler, maybe, but it has an orange crown. The Karoo eremomela could work, but it doesn't have as much yellow on its underparts and it occurs in arid regions.

What about the grey-backed camaroptera? The shape is right, but its eye is red, not white; it has dull underparts and its tail is usually held upright.

Then it must be a yellow-breasted apalis, right? Nope! Look at the eye and the colour of the crown.

Okay, I give up, tell me.

This is a green-capped eremomela. It's rare, but you sometimes come across noisy and hyperactive groups in woodland canopies. (They're abundant north of the Limpopo in Zimbabwe's miombo woodlands.)

You have to get up early to hear them sing: The males do so before sunrise. But if you sleep in, don't worry, you haven't missed much. They have a monotonous call.

Firefinch
facts · fun · feathers

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 1

TRAVEL JOURNAL



On Huskies into the unknown

Our latest Travel Journal series follows the adventures of **Jean Cooper** and **De Witt Oosthuizen**, who left Pretoria in September 2023 and rode their Husqvarna motorbikes all the way to Madrid! In this instalment, they travel through South Africa, Botswana, Namibia and Angola. Then they cross the border into the DRC…

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



On the way to Xangongo, the first Angolan town after crossing the border from Namibia. This section of road between Calueque and Xangongo consisted of 80 km of thick sand, criss-crossing the disintegrated tar road along the south-eastern bank of the Kunene River.

Opposite page, from the top:
A donkey cart in Botswana, photographed on the way to Kang. Jean and De Witt rode from Kamanjab to Ruacana in one day – here, they're camped at Ruacana Eha Lodge. A large baobab between Calueque and Xangongo, Angola, provided shade against the dry desert heat.

After about six months of planning, we finally hit the road. Friends, family and colleagues gathered at Trax Moto in Pretoria to see us off. This is where we'd bought our Husqvarna Norden 901 Expedition bikes only a month before. (Don't worry, we had plenty of experience on other motorcycles!) Some of our friends accompanied us through the streets of Pretoria on their own bikes until we reached Fountains Circle.

De Witt and I turned away to Krugersdorp and rode west through Koster, Swartruggens and Zeerust. In Zeerust we stopped for a Wimpy burger because when would we get the chance again? We decided to cross the Skilpadshek border post into Botswana before nightfall.

Despite the long line of trucks at the border, we crossed without a fuss. It was 16 September 2023 and the start of our adventure!

DAYS 2 – 7

Botswana & Namibia

We'd chosen the name "Expedition H2O" for our trip: The plan was to raise funds for a water supply project in the Free State. (See page 126 for more info.) But raising funds for a good cause wasn't the only motivation. We were both in our late 40s and this was an opportunity to reflect on what was truly important in our lives. There would be lots to think about over the thousands of kilometres that lay ahead.

From Lobatse, where we slept the first night, we continued to Kang (Night 2) and Gobabis (Night 3), then Windhoek and Okahandja, where we stopped to buy a brötchen.

We stayed with De Witt's friends on a farm about 10 km north-east of Okahandja for the next two nights and enjoyed a rest day. Pretoria was already 1 500 km behind us.

But there was bad news: We had planned to courier knobbly tyres from Trax Moto in Pretoria to Luanda, Angola. These tyres would be better suited to the muddy conditions that lay ahead, but it turned out our plan would cost an arm and a leg. Instead, we called several shops in Windhoek and then Luanda in search of suitable tyres. We found help in Luanda – the shop there told us our tyres would be waiting for us when we arrived.

De Witt's friends – and their dogs – had welcomed us with open arms. We relished the last few days of speaking Afrikaans to other people. Portuguese was next, then French. We also did some maintenance work on the bikes, cleaning and lubricating the chains and making sure all the bolts and nuts were tight. The unknown beckoned. My heart began to beat faster.

On Day 6 we rode north again – on a long, straight, hot tar road. This was not the place to fall asleep behind the handlebars… With the bikes set to cruise control at 110 km/h (you can do that now) we practised different stretches to loosen stiff legs and back muscles.

Before we could get too full of ourselves about our big adventure, we saw two cyclists approaching. They'd ridden all the way to that point from Europe and they were carrying on to Cape Town! They also told us about a guy who was currently in the Congo, *running* through Africa…

After a sociable evening with a group of German tourists in Kamanjab, we pushed on to the Kunene River. A storm struck, with raging wind and dust and lightning. We reduced our speed to 80 km/h, so the wind wouldn't blow us over, and hoped that the lightning would continue to hammer the hills and not our metal motorcycles.

Half an hour later, everything was dry and warm again. As we approached Ruacana, the landscape became bleaker and dustier and we saw goats, donkeys and smiling children along the way.

DAYS 8 – 17 Angola

We were up early to tackle the Omahenene-Calueque border post east of Ruacana. Did we have all the right papers? Immigration forms: Stamped! Passports: Stamped! It all went well until we had to print the temporary import permit (TIP) for the motorcycles. The printer wouldn't work. We waited and waited… And got through two hours later.

There were no more long, dull tar roads ahead. Now it was getting real. The first stretch was 80 km of thick sand. The fun started as soon as we turned right to Xangongo north of the border post. I fell over three times in the first 5 km and quickly learnt: Look far ahead, grip the bars lightly and open the throttle!

About 10 km before the end of the sandy section, De Witt also ate some dust. But there was a silver lining: When I pulled over to check on him, a good Samaritan ran up to me with one of my bags – it had fallen off my bike a way back and I hadn't even noticed. Crucially, it contained my passport, documents and all my cash!

At Xangongo, we sat down on the pavement with the locals and drank a Coke while Portuguese music pulsed in the background. We were in a new country! We decided to press on to Lubango, 286 km further because it was now tar all the way. (We just had to remember to ride on the right-hand side of the road…) We rode in the dark for the last hour (*big* mistake), but we arrived safely and just in time to watch the Springboks play Ireland in the Rugby World Cup.

Lobito (388 km) is on the coast. On the way there, the Karoo-like veld slowly filled with baobabs. Later, near Benguela, the vegetation resembled West Coast fynbos.

At Xangongo, we sat down on the pavement with the locals and drank a Coke while Portuguese music pulsed in the background. We were in a new country!

We stopped in Benguela to fill our fuel and water cells. These are flexible containers that fold away when not in use – more practical than a bulky jerry can. We each had two 6-litre Desert Fox cells: one for petrol and one for water. Darkness caught us again on the road between Benguela and Lobito.

The campsite that had been recommended to us was right on Lobito's party beach. It was pumping! This was not ideal for two tired riders who had just spent nine hours on motorcycles. So, we set off to the nearest hotel. We paid, unpacked, showered, ate and slept. The next day we'd see the sea.

On Day 10 we only rode 180 km, along a scenic tar road between Lobito and Sumbe. The coastal towns and fresh sea air gave everything a holiday feel. In Sumbe, we sat down at a beach restaurant – fish and chips and a beer cost about R145. Two young men washed our bikes while we ate.

The people were friendly and eager to help, but so poor. As white, middle-class South Africans, we know how to look the other way when we don't want to see something. In Angola, as in South Africa, different universes exist right next to each other. There are luxury SUVs with tinted windows alongside heavily laden scooters whose riders are trying to eke out an existence. There are tourism viewpoints overlooking the Atlantic Ocean where shiploads of people were sent off to be slaves.

Earlier in the day, when we wanted a break, we turned off onto a small path along the seaside. Fishermen were mending their nets and putting their catch on drying racks. It was a brief encounter with a world that had existed for centuries; a world you'd normally rush past on the main road. A group of teenage boys approached to ask if they could look at our bikes. For a moment, they touched things from a seemingly untouchable world.

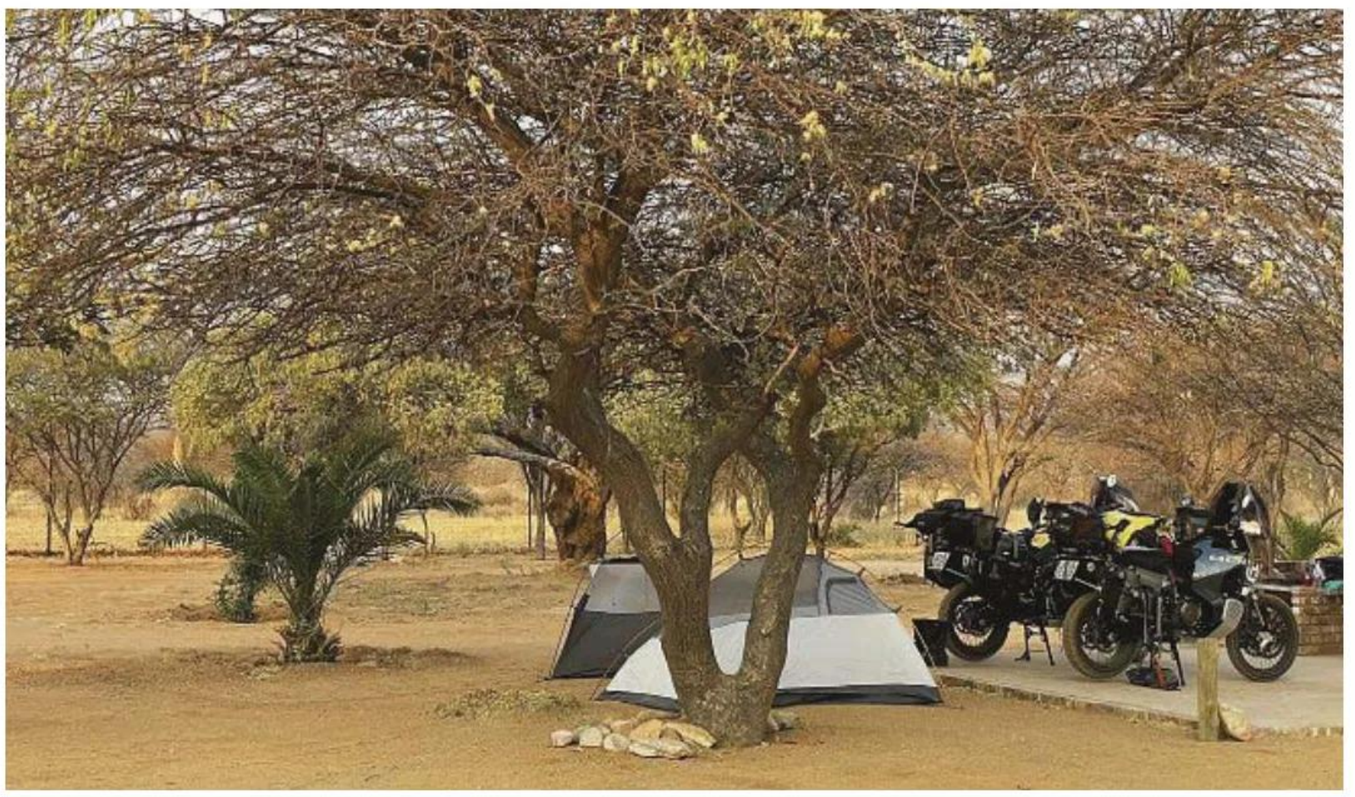
How little I knew about Africa! Only now, with the melding of cultures that our expedition offered, were my eyes slowly opening to the existence of a place like Luanda, which we reached after 400 km on a tar road from Sumbe.

The tyres we'd ordered for collection in Luanda ended up being soft racing tyres that wouldn't last 20 km beneath our heavy bikes. We called around and decided to go with the original plan after all – we'd have our tyres couriered from Pretoria to Pointe-Noire in the Republic of the Congo. The bad news? It would cost R17 000 and would take up to 20 days…

In Luanda, we spent three nights with colleagues of my wife Fransie. They introduced us to local experts on water purification – a subject of interest to us because of our project in the Free State. We also visited a reverse osmosis factory outside the city, gave a talk at a school and serviced the bikes.

A note on Luanda's traffic: It weaves and hoots







Opposite page, clockwise from top left: These cargo-carrying motorbikes (this one is a Keweseki) are common in Angola and the DRC. Jean stands in front of the Christ the King statue in Lubango, on a hill overlooking the city. The 30-metre-high statue, built in 1957, was inspired by the Christ the Redeemer statue in Rio de Janeiro. Young men admire and take cellphone photos of the Husqvarnas as the adventurers reach the ocean near Sumbe, on the way to Luanda. De Witt stands on the same hill where the Christ the King statue is in Lubango. At a seaside restaurant in Sumbe, Jean enjoyed a tasty meal of fish, rice and chips, washed down with a beer. Riding through thick sand is tricky – but they learnt their lessons quickly. "Each time you had to pick up the bike, you wished you had packed lighter!" says Jean.

We felt like aliens with helmets and boots and padded clothing.

and buzzes and shoves and swerves without anyone getting angry. When the steaming maelstrom of metal and tar finally spat us out alive on the northern side of the city, on the way to Nzeto, we had to stop to make sure that we were still us, in our own bodies, alive and in one piece.

Nzeto (265 km north of Luanda) is a fishing town. Hundreds of boats were in the bay and on the beach. A few heads turned when we wobbled through the sand on our Huskies, past the hubbub, and parked next to two shipwrecks. We felt like aliens with helmets and boots and padded clothing.

Our little hotel's upper veranda peeked at the sea over rooftops. We drank a beer and chatted on the phone to an Irishman who was also riding through Africa. He was almost in Cameroon, on the same route as we were planning, and he assured us that the roads were passable and dry. We could stop worrying about the rain.

The next morning when we woke up, it was raining. We found a fuel station and left at 10 am with full tanks and a ham sandwich each. The potholes were so bad at times that we had to drop down to second gear. The landscape undulated and the road wound through rocky outcrops that later became hills. We reached Mbanza-Kongo (220 km inland) around lunchtime and rode another 60 km to the Luvo border post. After about 45 minutes we got stamped out of Angola. The gate into the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) opened, and we rode into a wall of people, taxis, scooters and trucks. The chaos was bewildering.

"This is a no-man's land," De Witt said over our helmet intercom. "We don't want to sleep here tonight."

A big Congolese man in uniform waved us over with a broad smile. He glanced at our passports, yellow fever cards and motorcycle papers while an old man tried to sell me some home-made concoction. The official chased the old man away and chaperoned us through the process to the last step, where we had to wait a bit for our passports to be stamped.

We were drenched in sweat. It was hot and humid. We waited. And waited.

Finally, we were invited into a building and a stern but polite man told us to sit down. He held both our passports and asked, "Who is Jean?" He said my visa was fine. Then he asked, "Who is Johann?" De Witt raised his hand. The man looked at him over his glasses. "With you, there is a problem. Your visa is only valid from 3 October, which is three days from now. So, you must go back to Angola and come again in three days. No problem."

All of a sudden, sleeping in no-man's land was a real possibility…

Luckily another friendly customs official accompanied us back to the Angolan side and before long we were in Mbanza-Kongo again. We stopped at an empty petrol station to buy cooldrinks and figure out where we would sleep. It was already dark. A group of guys at a table saw the two tired foreigners and immediately bought us beer. They signalled a young man on a small motorcycle to lead us to Hotel Congo.

What a day! But we'd found a bed for R250 each, a hot shower and a plate of fresh fish and rice. So much to be grateful for!

We had two days of downtime in Mbanza-Kongo. Two ATMS later and we had cash. Now we had to find petrol. The attendant at the basically dry Pumangol filling station informed us that their petrol would only arrive on Tuesday. It was Sunday. We ordered a coffee at the little shop and considered our options.

Next thing, the attendant appeared beside us. He said something in Portuguese and we only understood one word – *gasolina* – but his body language and intonation made it clear that we were getting special treatment. Half an hour later and our bikes' tanks were full to the brim.

We spent three nights at Hotel Congo and we got to know the staff quite well. The night before we left, the kitchen ladies prepared a huge chicken dish for us as a farewell gesture. They peeped out of the serving hatch and laughed when they saw our astonished faces.

DAY 18 Democratic Republic of the Congo

The next day we passed through the Luvo border post (Lufu on the DRC side) without a problem and turned west towards Matadi. There aren't many places where vehicles can cross the Congo River. There's a ferry upstream at Kinshasa, but it's apparently chaotic; and there's a bridge at Matadi, 95 km west of the Lufu border post, which is where we were headed.

Matadi. How can you put into words something you've never even imagined?

I'll start with an image that will forever be imprinted in my memory. A young man's face, drenched in sweat. He was piloting a yellow Keweseki (no, not a *Kawasaki*) three-wheel cargo motorcycle loaded with water containers. Four kind-hearted souls pushed from behind. Upward, along a twisting mountain pass. Around the Keweseki there were hundreds of other motorcycles carrying passengers and every kind of consumer goods imaginable, from hairpins to ship's anchors. Not to mention live goats and pigs. There were also three 26-ton trucks – two going up and one coming down. One had broken down and when the other two had tried to overtake it, they'd got stuck between the rock walls along the road. It was 42° C with 100% humidity. No one could go forwards or backwards.

We were on our way down. Matadi, the Congo River and the bridge were somewhere down below. We waited for about an hour. Later, a man took control of the situation and got one truck to move an inch

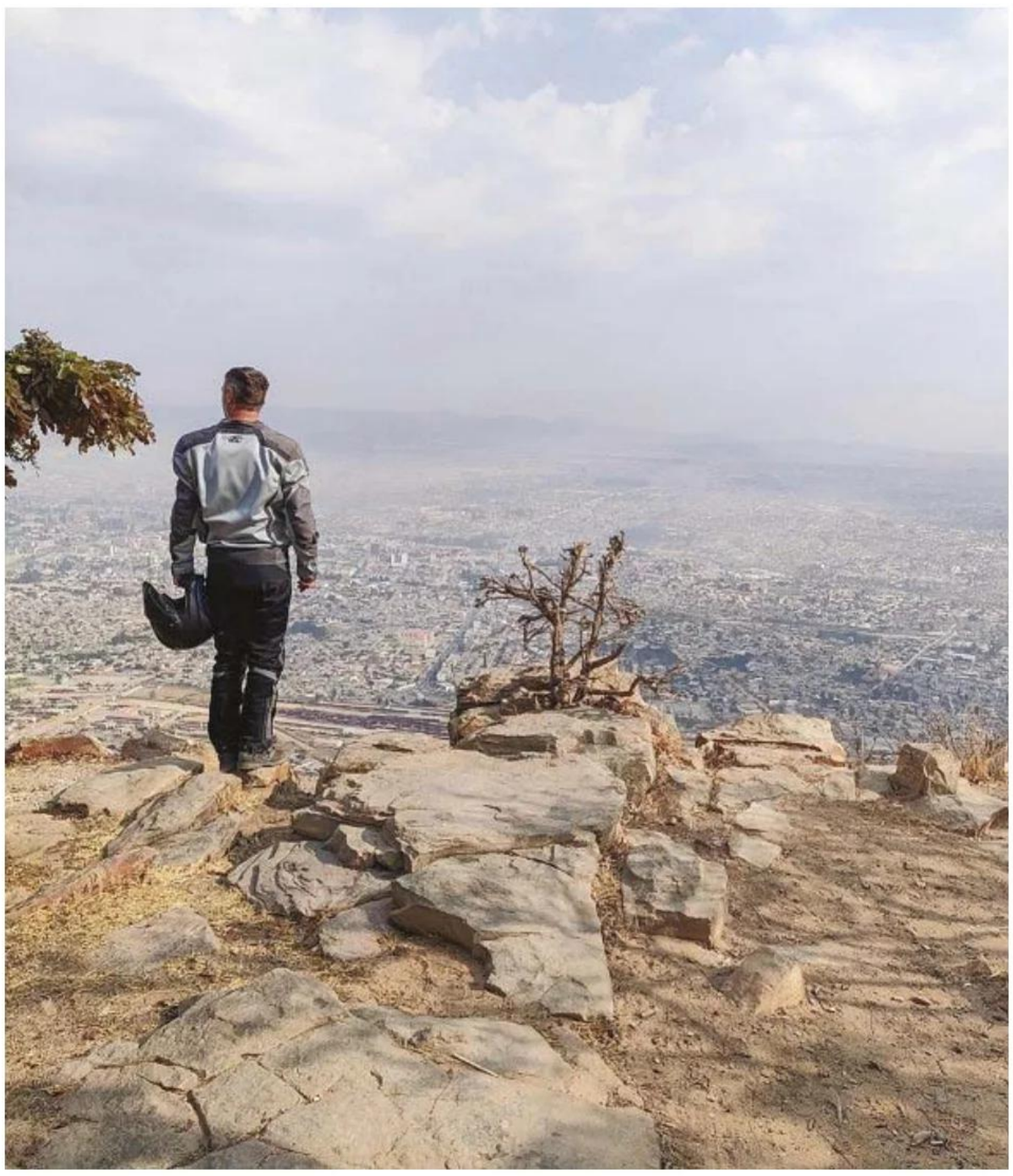

Keweseki 928899999











Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Taking a break in the DRC on the way to the Cabinda border. This stretch of road consisted of a network of sandy paths between oil drills that kept the GPS guessing. In the vicinity of the port city of Matadi, the Congo River varies in width from 520 m to 1,8 km. Jean with people they met on the way to Nzeto, Angola. "This is one of the many scenes that typified our journey," Jean says. "Everywhere, we encountered people wishing us well." The Matadi Bridge, completed in 1983, was built by a consortium of Japanese companies.

forward up the slope. Then two officers with AK-47s came to help. It's easy: Swing an AK around and people will move, even if they have to defy the laws of gravity to do so.

We were all channelled into two single-file rows so that traffic could flow. It was then that the face of the young man caught my eye, and I took my imaginary photo.

Zoom out some more: Matadi is on the southern bank of the Congo River. It's close enough to the massive river mouth about 125 km west that large ships can unload their cargo here, to be transported another 350 km to Kinshasa by truck. The main road connecting the DRC with the rest of the world runs right through the middle of Matadi. A road as wide as Pierneef Street in Pretoria; sometimes narrower, because there are stalls and throngs of people.

One more mental image: A little girl, holding her little brother's hand. Both in neat school uniforms on their way home. They take the daily chaos in their stride, skipping past truck wheels more than twice their height.

Finally, we crossed the bridge and the Congo River. From Matadi, it was 120 km to Boma, where we'd spend the night, and then 140 km to Cabinda on the coast. The road to Cabinda was freshly paved and snaked between hills and valleys, but it turned to sand on the other side of Kitombe. The further we went, the thicker the sand became, and the more confused the GPS got.

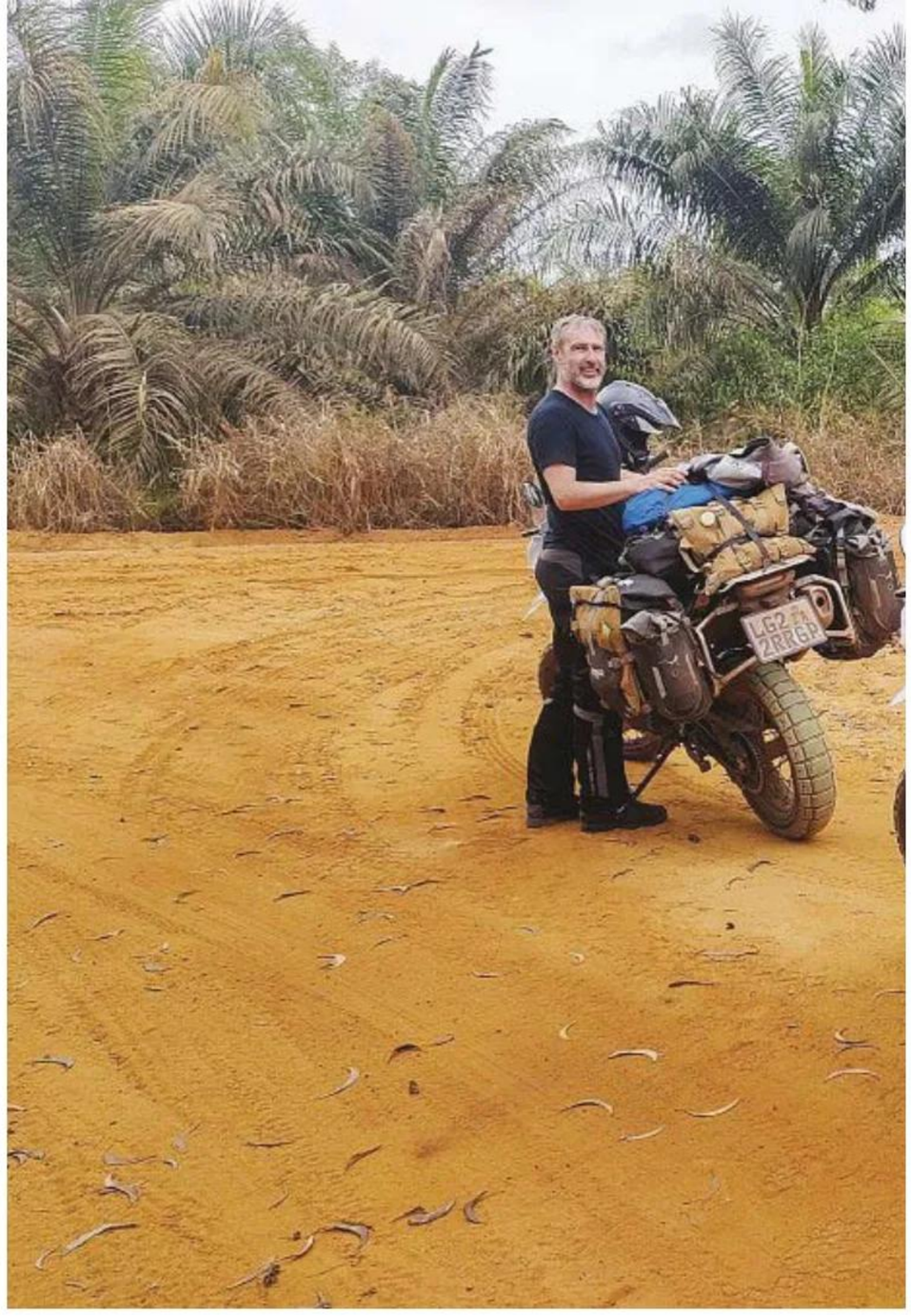
Fortunately, De Witt never gets lost. He always has the map memorised. We followed his instincts and the French hand gestures of people we met along the way, and slowly squiggled through the sand.

Suddenly, a fully loaded Toyota Corolla charged down the two-track path towards us. I tried to move to the track on the right, over the middelmannetjie because I could see the Corolla veering left. But I lost my balance and fell. The bike landed on my right foot. It hurt too much to move, but I also knew that nothing was broken.

De Witt rushed over and lifted the bike so I could roll away. A bakkie full of people stopped and also helped to get the bike back onto its wheels. They waved and drove on.

We deflated our tyres to get more traction in the sand and continued in silence; thinking, there's so much that can go wrong on a trip like this. Today, thank goodness, my thick riding boot had saved me from disaster, but we were both apprehensive about what lay ahead…

NEXT ISSUE: What awaits the riders in the "other" Congo? And Cameroon? This article is an edited version of Jean's blog posts as published on expedition-h2o.org



ESSENTIAL GEAR

Motorcycles. Jean previously owned a Husqvarna Norden 901 and travelled about 20 000 km around South Africa on that bike. He has faith in Husqvarna as a brand, so when the new Norden 901 Expedition model came out, he couldn't resist.

The Expedition model (which they both rode on this tour) has better shock absorbers than the standard Norden 901. It's a reliable machine with enough power and a reputation for good dirt and tar capabilities.

Air filters. Jean and De Witt installed prefilters beneath the seats to remove most of the dust before it got into the main air filters. The prefilters were made of sponge and they could wash and reuse them.

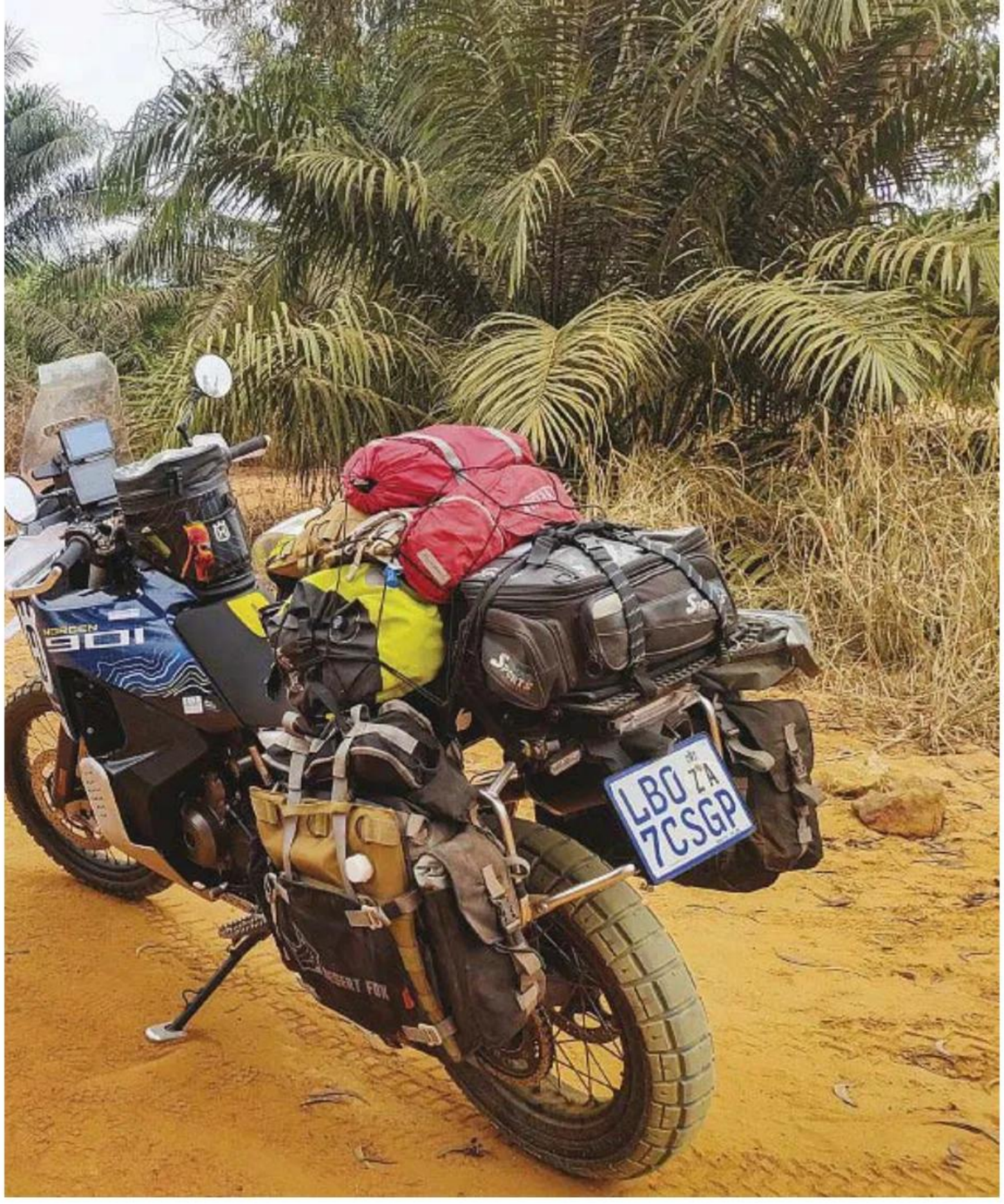
Petrol filters. Fuel can sometimes be dirty or diluted with water. Jean and De Witt used a special petrol filter that fitted into the tank like a sock, and they filled the tank through this filter. The filter removes solid particles and water from the fuel.

Fuel. Each bike has a 19-litre tank and they could get about 350 – 400 km per tank, depending on conditions. They each also carried an extra 6-litre fuel cell, like a foldable jerry can.

Luggage. Weight is your enemy on a motorcycle. Jean and De Witt only travelled with essential clothes, camping gear, equipment and spare parts. They each carried an extra set of tyres for a large part of the tour, which added a lot of weight.

Tyres. Pirelli Scorpion Rally STR tyres worked the best. And Mitas E-09 Dakar tyres did well on muddy roads.

Preparation. Riaan Koen and his team at Trax Moto (traxmoto.co.za) in Pretoria spent a full day with the two, teaching them how to service the bikes, change the oil and tyres, and adjust the chains.


LBO
ZA
7CSGP





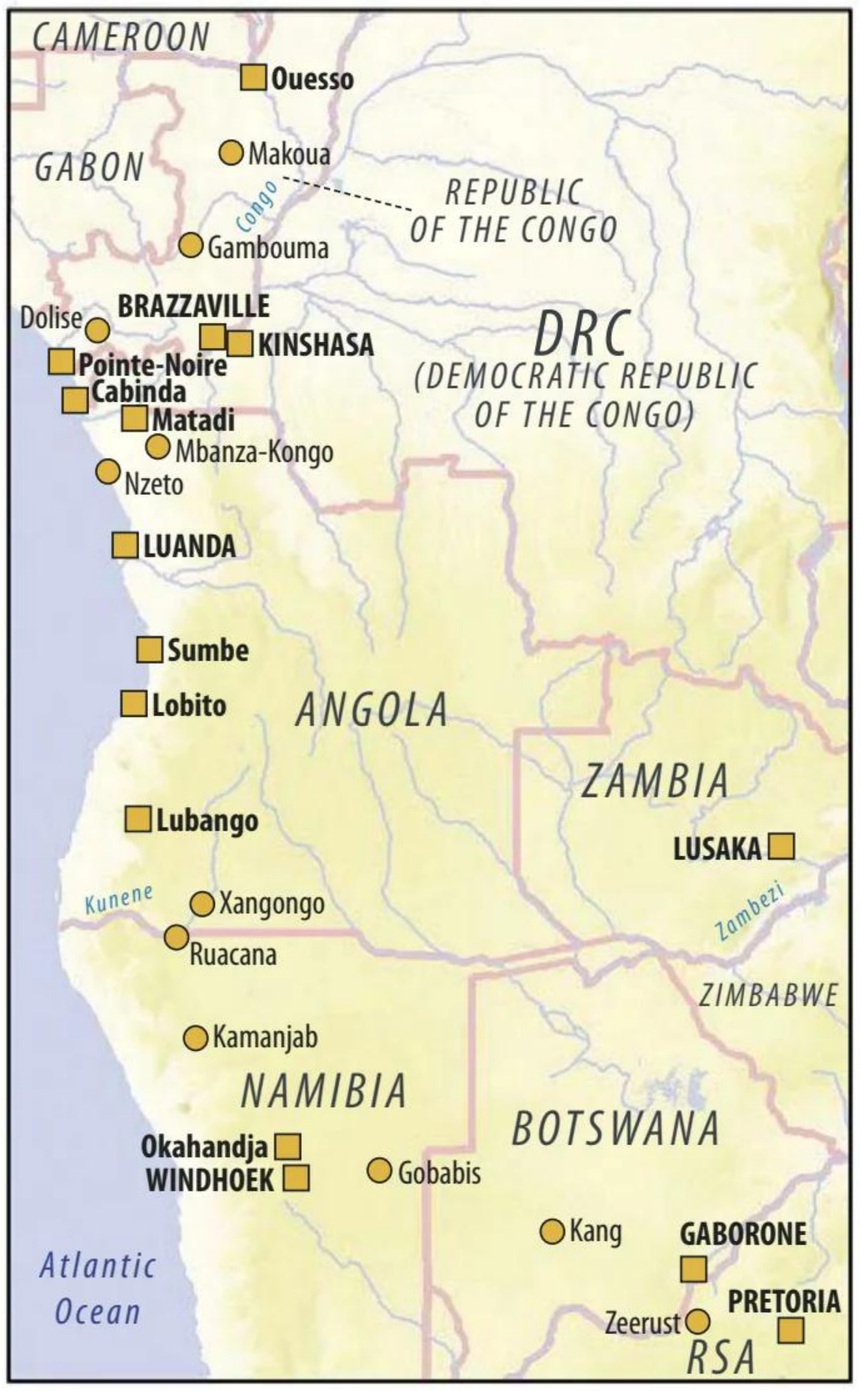






Left: De Witt works on his Husqvarna during a two-day stopover on a farm outside Okahandja – rest days were always partially devoted to servicing their motorbikes.

Below: De Witt and Jean with the Congo River and Matadi in the background.



MEET THE ADVENTURERS

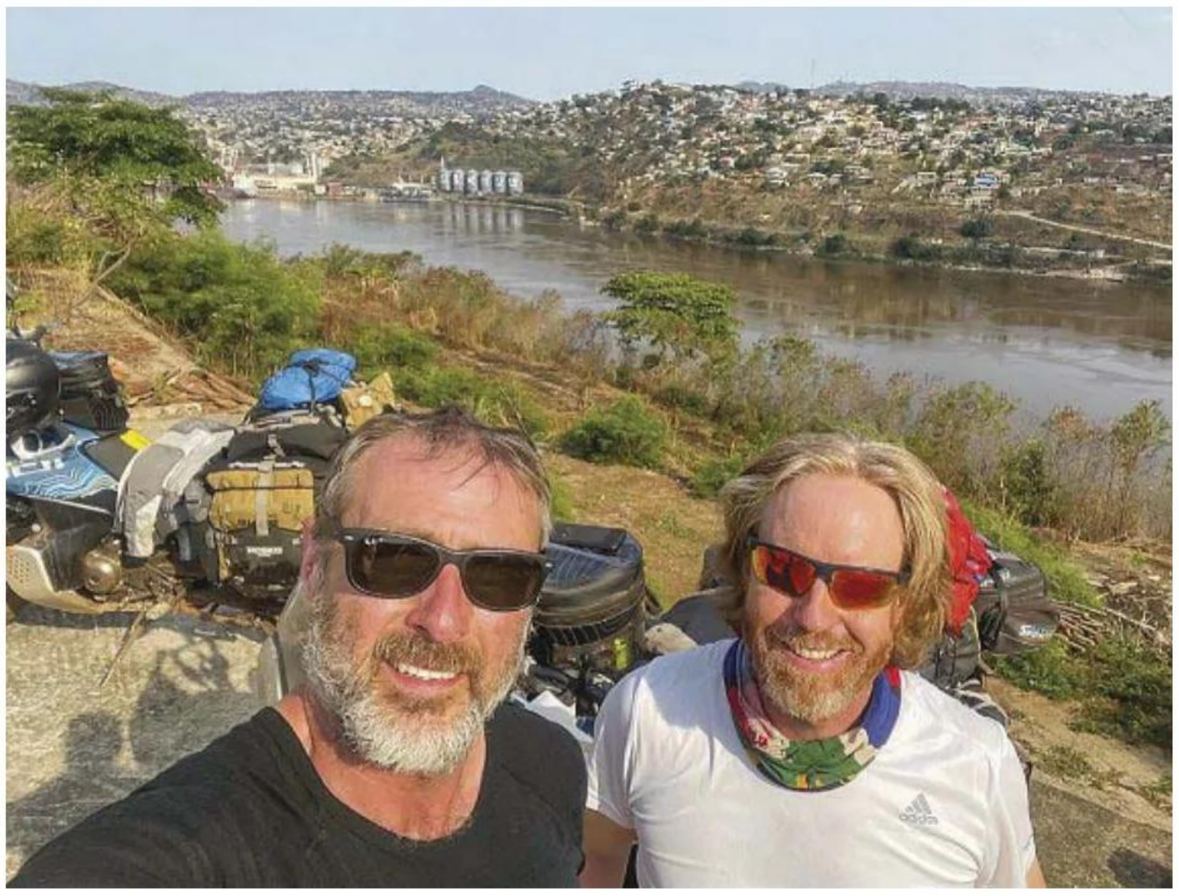
Jean Cooper and De Witt Oosthuizen have known each other since their university days in the late 1990s. They were both in Sonop residence at the University of Pretoria, where De Witt studied medicine and Jean studied industrial psychology.

Jean later completed his doctorate and works as a management consultant for different organisations. He and his wife Fransie live in Pretoria and they have three children – Riëtte (15), Rose (17) and Francois (19).

De Witt grew up in Amersfoort in Mpumalanga. He 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 make a donation.



VISAS

De Witt and Jean didn't need a visa for Botswana, Namibia or Angola. A visa for the DRC costs R2 625 per person; they had to get it from the embassy in Pretoria beforehand.

WHERE THEY STAYED

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

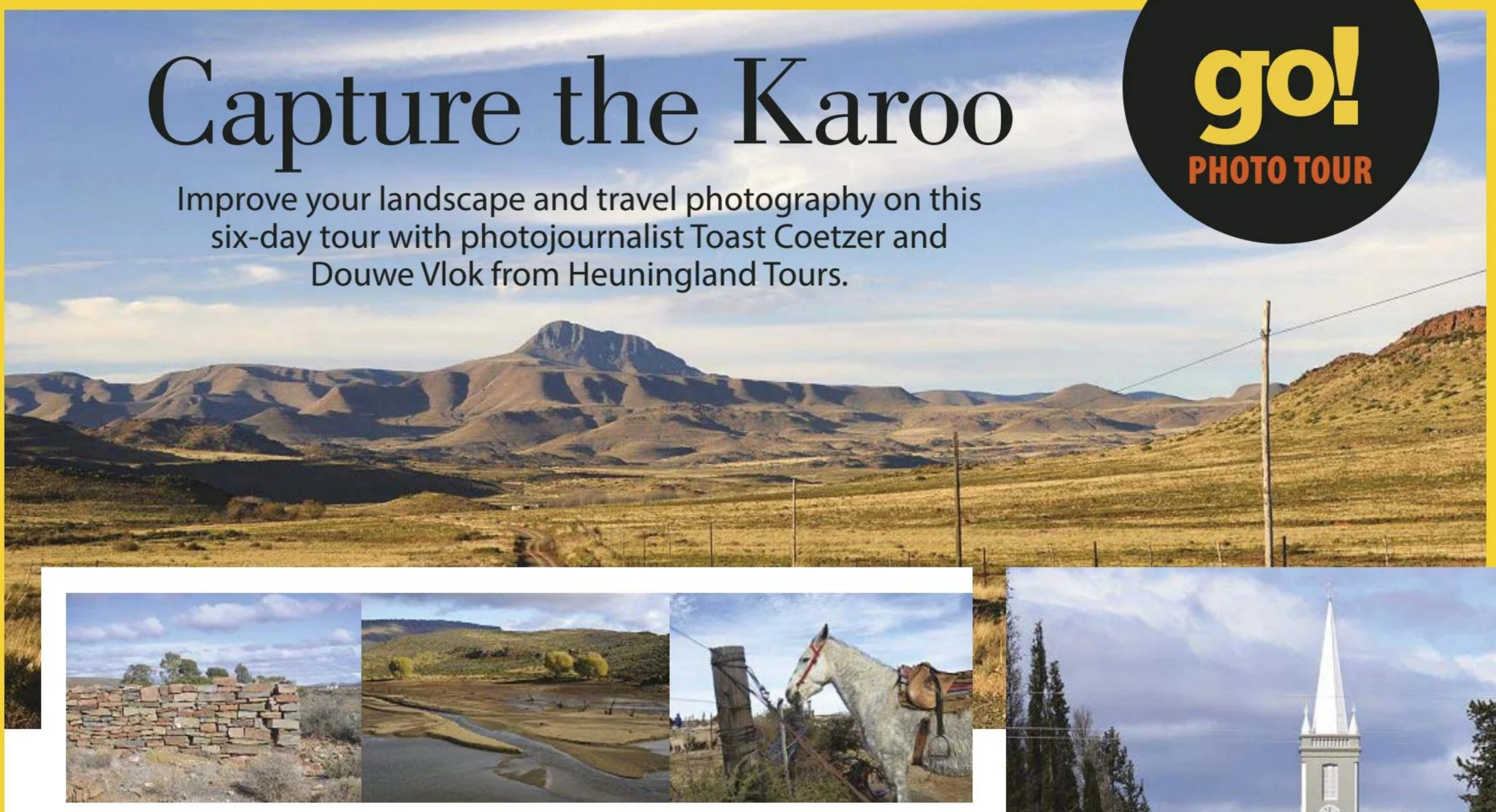
Day 1: Lobatse, Cha-Ri Lodge (chalet, R450 per person)
Day 2: Kang, Kalahari Rest Lodge (chalet, R1 056 per person)
Day 3: Gobabis, Gobabis Guest House (room, R395 per person)
Day 4 – 5: Okahandja, on a farm with friends
Day 6: Kamanjab, Kaoko Bush Lodge (camping, R455 per person)
Day 7: Ruacana, Eha Lodge (camping, R390 per person)
Day 8: Lubango, someone called Herman's garden (camping, free)
Day 9: Lobito, Terminus Hotel (room, R1 104 per person)
Day 10: Sumbe, Marulho Resort (room, R659 per person)
Day 11 – 13: Luanda, with friends
Day 14: Nzeto, Residencial Perola do Nzeto (room, R178 per person)
Day 15 – 17: Mbanza-Kongo, Hotel Congo (room, R250 per person)
Day 18: Boma, Hotel Mabuilu (room, R639 per person)*
Day 19: Cabinda, Angola, Hotel Pôr do Sol (room, R404 per person)

** De Witt and Jean always had to book two rooms in the DRC because men aren't allowed to share a room.*

Capture the Karoo

go! PHOTO TOUR

Improve your landscape and travel photography on this six-day tour with photojournalist Toast Coetzer and Douwe Vlok from Heuningland Tours.



A lonely windmill stands in just the right place. A koppie catches the orange glow of sunset. A flock of sheep next to an old stone kraal… Yes, the Karoo is a photographer's dream!

On this intimate tour, photojournalist Toast Coetzer will be on hand to help you learn all about composition, light, and the inner workings of your camera. (All cameras are welcome, from mirrorless to smartphones!) The itinerary is designed to include stops at a handful of great sites every day. The pace is easy – and there will be time to do birding, too. Non-photographers are also welcome.

The trip is a celebration of the Karoo and covers an area Toast and guide Douwe Vlok of Heuningland Tours know very well. They both grew up in the Karoo and will take you to some of their favourite places – including some surprises!

For example, have you ever seen the incredible rock engravings at Nelspoort? And have you heard of storyteller Antoinette Pienaar? You'll get to see the rock art and spend a night at Antoinette's farm, Theefontein.

From there, we'll drive a back road (via a vintage car collection in the middle of nowhere!) to beautiful Murraysburg, and then continue to Doornberg Guest Farm, at the foot of Compassberg near Nieu-Bethesda.

Doornberg will be our base for two days, as we visit the Owl House and other Nieu-Bethesda attractions like the Stone Folk of Ongeluksloot, a collection of statues set along a short walking trail. You'll get to explore the village's dusty streets on foot, which will offer plenty of photo opportunities – from portraits to abstract shots.

Day four is spent at the historic Ganora Guest Farm, also in the Nieu-Bethesda district. Here we'll visit their fossil museum and photograph farm activities. In the evening, after a sumptuous dinner, Toast will be available for feedback sessions where everyone can share their day's images.

From Ganora, we drive on more back roads to Graaff-Reinet. We'll travel along the base of Nardousberg to Waterval Farmstay. The afternoon's activity will include a portrait session.

This will be our final night together and after a *kuier* around the braai fire, we say our goodbyes the following morning and head back home.



NEED TO KNOW

Dates: 19 – 24 March 2025
Cost: R14 800 per person sharing (Single: plus 30%)
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Start: Travalia farm stall, N1 (near Three Sisters)
End: Waterval Farmstay, Graaff-Reinet
Total distance: 450 km (estimate)
Maximum number of guests: 14

WHAT WE SUPPLY

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- Photography host
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CROSSWORD PUZZLE

BY GERDA ENGELBRECHT

SOLUTION ON **PAGE 104**





Region in Namibia
A thing
Antimony (symbol)
A rock formation (7,4)
Pismire
Foul-smelling
Thallium (symbol)
Automatic
Tennes-sine (symbol)
Modus operandi (abbr)
Brawl
Unit of power
Small monkey
Acorn tree
Beast of burden
Islet
Fish bait
A flat blade
Frisbee
Swim
Radium (symbol)
Unwanted plant
Yellowish-green mixture
Mix
Sketch
Each
Overhaul
Sedative
Increase
Belonging to me
Depart
Hollow
Thus
Employs
Tin (symbol)
Helium (symbol)
Type of fish
Combat
Glittered
Katana
Swarm
Not off
Namutoni camp is in this park
Grass-land
Isolate (3,5)
Tantalum (symbol)
Expert
Pants
Height (abbr)
Towards





Long shaft
Point (abbr)
"I see!"
Favour
Hello (inf)
Stitch up
Surrender
Carry out
Observe
Thulium (symbol)
Tilting
VI
Not you
Silicon (symbol)
Large
Rhesus (abbr)
Pipe
Chaos
Sea's rise and fall
Type of eagle-owl
Drakens-berg trail
Scrap
Pale
Cut
Paid (abbr)
Indicates origin
Not out
Power (abbr)
Great (prefix)
Iron (symbol)
Sloth
Roent-genium (symbol)
Impostor
Personal assistant (abbr)
Loving
Opera solo
Deserve

FRANÇOIS HAASBROEK; ESMA MARNEWICK; RONEL STEYN; SHELLEY CHRISTIANS



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LETTER FROM *Skeleton Coast*

Namibia's Skeleton Coast is one of the last wild places on earth. **Esma Marnewick** went on a rescue mission and found her bearings without any signposts.

One of the greatest dramas to ever play out on the desolate beaches of the Skeleton Coast occurred in 1942, after the *Dunedin Star* ran aground. During the rescue mission to save the 106 people on board, several other ships and even an aircraft went down.

The sand has long since buried the wreck, but I looked forward to seeing the spot where this dramatic event had taken place. Our plan was to visit it on the second day of our week-long guided tour with Unbounded Namibia Safaris & Tours.

That morning, two members of the support team, Hansie Ruben and Guido Johannesmeier, travelled ahead and took a shortcut along the coast to Bosluis Bay, our next overnight stop. I was travelling with tour leader Phil van Wyk. We led the rest of the convoy on a scenic detour: We'd travel inland first and later return to the coast. The arrangement was that Hansie and Guido would put down pieces of wood at a predetermined place at the Angria Fria seal colony to indicate that they'd passed that point safely.

But when we arrived at the seal colony around 3.30 pm, there was no wood to be seen. Where were Hansie and Guido? Did they get stuck in the sand on the other side of the Khumib River where we'd said goodbye six hours ago?

We drove on, past a radio mast a few kilometres further. Still no sign of them. We turned around to see if we could find the tracks of their Land Cruiser in the sand, but the wind had already erased our own...

"You know, it's Murphy's Law," Phil said. "If we drive on to Bosluis Bay, they'll be stuck at the Khumib. And if we drive to Khumib, they'll be waiting for us in Bosluis Bay."

To keep Murphy at bay, another guide accompanied the tour group to Bosluis Bay, about 100 km further north, and Phil and I turned around to head south to the Khumib River, 75 km away. We kept to the coast – on the route Hansie and Guido would have taken – instead of going over the mountains like earlier in the day. The wind blew sea foam across the sand. "Hansie, Guido, come in," Phil called over the radio every 5 km. Silence.

It was 5.30 pm by now. A mountain appeared that's used as a landmark when you're close to the mouth of the Khumib River. If the two were stranded around here, we'd be in range of their radios. "Hansie, Guido, come in. Hansie, Guido, come in." Only the waves answered.

We had to turn back. Where *were* they?!

When we passed Angra Fria again, the seals were having sundowners. The sun touched the ocean and the wind picked up. We sped across the surreal landscape like two explorers trying to reach the gates of a city before sunset. Driftwood reached from the sand like bony fingers grabbing at our vehicle.

We navigated sandy stretches between sharp rocks in the last light. Night had fallen by the time we reached the radio mast. At 7.15 pm, we came to the spot where we'd left the tour group earlier – we still had 100 km on sand to go.

We set off along the coast. The receding tide left pools and channels of water in its wake. If we got stuck here...

In the dark, the majestic landscape was reduced to wan pools of light in front of the vehicle. Where *were* they? Where were *we*?

The sway of driving was hypnotic and I gave a yawn. The wind swept up puffs of sand that looked like spirits on their way to haunt someone. Finally, on the other side of a big dune, we saw a light in the distance: Bosluis Bay.

Everyone was happy to see us, including Hansie and Guido! It turns out they did put out the pieces of wood, but not exactly where Phil thought they would...

Look, it wasn't a life-or-death adventure by any means, but there was a moment during our frantic dash that I'll never forget.

Somewhere along the way, Phil pulled over. In the seemingly impenetrable darkness, I could make out a few poles planted in the sand: the remnants of the shelter built by the bedraggled survivors of the wrecked *Dunedin Star*.

I got out of the car with goosebumps all over my body. People waited here in the middle of nowhere for about two weeks for help to arrive. The wind had raged then as it was raging now.

Beneath all the trauma, I wondered if any of them had found the space in their hearts to appreciate the austere beauty of this ferocious coast. When they were safely back home, did they miss this beach, where the sun, sand and stars are the only markers of your place in the world?

I knew I would.

We sped across the surreal landscape like two explorers trying to reach the gates of a city before sunset. Driftwood reached from the sand like bony fingers grabbing at our vehicle.



Driving south from the tiny settlement of Middelpos on the Roggeveld Plateau, the Gannaga Pass descends into the hotter, drier Tankwa Karoo below. Although the pass falls within the boundaries of the Tankwa Karoo National Park these days, it's still a public road and you don't have to pay a park fee if you're just passing through. You can normally drive the pass in any 4x2 vehicle with good ground clearance.

The SANParks office is at Roodewerf. This is where you need to report to if you've booked accommodation in the park. Another good place to stay, especially for self-reliant campers, is Ymansdam, just north of the park.

PICTURE **TOAST COETZER**

Read about the Tankwa in our brand-new special edition, on sale now. Also read about other great gravel passes in the region; the best farm stalls on Route 62; and family-friendly guest farms in the Eastern Cape Karoo. *go! Karoo* (R135) is available in store and online: media24shop.com



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GO_FEB/MAR22 PDF

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