SOUTH AFRICAN

COUNTRY LIFE

JUNE 2018

THE REAL HEART OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

UP THE PASS

- High jinks with Obie Oberholzer
- Close encounters on the Pakhuis

Slow, slow, quick-quick, slow in SEDGEFIELD

Crash! Bang! Boom! in TIFFINDELL

HOW TO CATCH A TIGER

Glam it up UNDER CANVAS

Hot & spicy from the Heartland

WIN Madikwe safari worth R30 000

Umhlanga's wild side

Overberg We Go

Ride Riversdale • Take the ale trail • Browse Hermanus bookstores • Birding bliss on the Swartrivier road

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In This Issue

EDITOR'S CHOICE Some great adventures await you inside this issue. Obie Oberholzer takes us onto the Grootrivier Pass, up through ancient yellowwoods to where the trees give way to pastures and fields of fynbos at the top, which is where the adventure really begins. And then for something completely different, join our tiger-fishing supremos as they do battle on the Upper Zambezi with the greatest adversary of any freshwater angler. It's not for sissies, much like our encounter with the slopes of Tiffindell Ski Resort, in the Eastern Cape Highlands close to Lesotho. A case of Crash! Bang! Boom!

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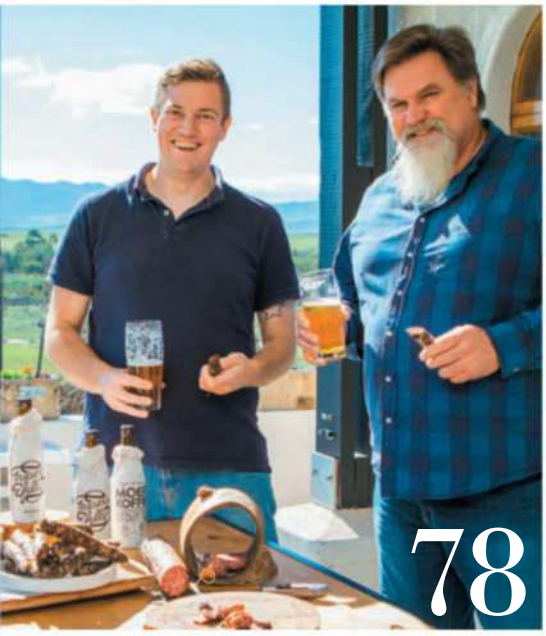
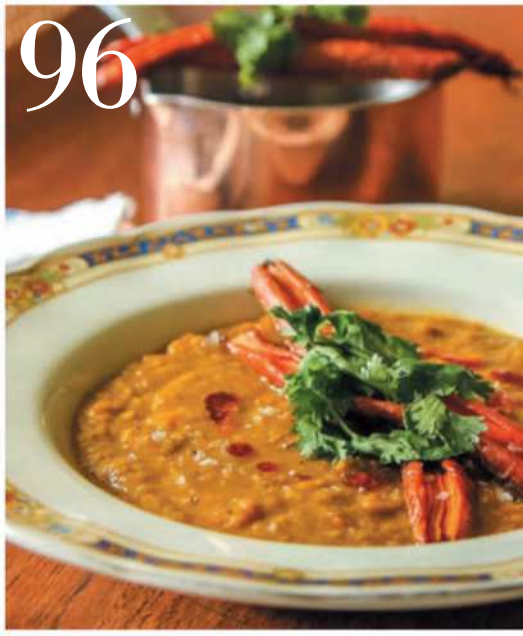
ON THE COVER
Our cover photograph of the rolling farmlands of the Overberg Wheatbelt in full cry was taken by Ann Gadd. Read Ann's feature *What's Brewing in the Overberg* on page 78.



What's Brewing in the Overberg? Plenty. Like some pretty good craft breweries among splendid scenery.

The Centre of the Universe: If you thought Sedgefield was sleepy, best take a turn into this Garden Route town.



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Soon homes will be super-smart. But will their occupants be as smart?
Read Smart Homes Will Happen in our series
Future Watch
by Colin Cullis on page 88

Editor's Note

Searching for Dead Parrot, Laughing Croc and Moer Koffie. . .

Sometimes, just for the heck of it, and more often to avoid the Hermanus holiday traffic, we take a detour via Caledon, stopping off at Dassiesfontein farmstall and Van Brakel Stoor to stock up on farm-fresh bakes and bottled delights, and have a leisurely browse. As you descend Houwhoek Pass, the view of the patchwork of rolling farmlands in full cry, stretching as far as the eye can see, is always nothing short of spectacular – pretty much like the quintessential Overberg scene on our cover.

The Overberg is a vague geographical designation that originally referred to the entire Cape interior – all the land beyond the Hottentots-Holland mountains (hence 'over the berg') stretching all the way to Albertinia. The region's most important crops were once fruit in the Elgin-Grabouw area, and grains, but wine farms, especially over the past two decades, have transformed the area.

The Hemel-en-Aarde Valley alone boasts more than 15 renowned wine farms, but our stop is Paul Cluver Wines in Elgin, where we meet winemaker Andries Burger and sample some of his award-winning wines (*Fine Wines*, page 95).

But craft breweries have also sprung up and, if you tire of wine tasting, join us on a beer crawl over the Akkedisbergpas, along dirt roads to Papiesvlei and Doornbosch. Here we taste some great artisanal beers with quirky names – Dead Parrot, Laughing Croc, Pot Belly, and a Fraser's Folly stout named Moer Koffie, the only condensed-milk and coffee-flavoured beer. It's sure to kick-start your day but I don't think I'll trade my morning cappuccino just yet (*What's Brewing in the Overberg?* page 78).

Many farmers have embraced the concept of leisure tourism and the area has become a playground for outdoor enthusiasts. So, we head east on the N2 following the lie of the Langeberg mountains to Riversdale, where we meet up with winemaker Abraham de Klerk and a group of his riding companions for a fun weekend on the varied mountain-biking trails (*Riding Riversdale*, page 64).

The Overberg wheatbelt is nirvana for birders, and Anton Odendal of BirdLife Overberg takes us along the Swartrivier and Karwyderskraal roads between Botrivier and Hermanus. In a morning he manages to tick 119 species, including 19 endemics, and the spectacle of pairs of Blue Cranes displaying and dancing is a memorable highlight (*Wheatbelt Birding at its Best*, page 70).

Our last Overberg stop is the seaside town of Hermanus. Usually I count the number of churches and bottle stores in a town just to test my theory that they are usually present in equal numbers. Not often do book shops make it into the equation, but here in Hermanus is a bibliophile's paradise and, once you have walked the Cliff Path and admired the views, where better than in a book shop to put your feet up and relax.

Nita

Nita Hazell
Editor

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Contributors

Dale Morris

Dale Morris is a multi-award-winning journalist and photographer who is in love with the idea of trying out new things. Be it scuba diving, parachuting, bungee jumping, ostrich riding or hippo wrestling, Dale is always willing to give it a go for the sake of a good story. Thing is, he's usually scared stiff by his chosen subject topics. "Or else just plain useless," he says. "I like to try out challenges that are often dominated by heroes or athletic types, and I am neither. I want to show readers that if an incompetent subhuman such as myself can at least try, then the door is open for all of us." Read about Dale's heroic attempts at a bit of Olympic-style slalem at Tiffindell Ski Resort in the Eastern Cape Highlands, in **Downhill Racers** on page 32.

George Robey

Outdoor writer and photographer **George Robey** finds himself in a familiar journalistic pickle. If he wasn't tied to the computer, he could spend more time outdoors… but, without assignments, there would be fewer travel opportunities. Truth be known, George enjoys every moment of his hectic schedule as senior staff writer for *The Bass Angler* magazine in South Africa and as a prolific journalist who appears in various overseas publications. George has chased stories throughout the world, from Canada and Mexico to South America and across Africa, yet one of his favourite destinations remains the Upper Zambezi, in search of trophy tiger fish. Read about his most recent adventure there in **Tigers Take No Prisoners** on page 74

Andrea Abbott

"Modern Umhlanga can be a sobering sight for those of us who grew up there long ago," says regular contributor **Andrea Abbott**. "In those halcyon days the blue school bus trundled along a narrow road between sugar-cane fields on its route between Atholton Primary in the then sleepy Mt Edgecombe and the erstwhile village of Umhlanga. Today, Atholton is in Umhlanga and that narrow road is a highway, the fields growing buildings instead of sugar cane. Similarly, the coastal and dune forests that were the playground of carefree kids have transformed into a concrete forest." But one exquisite wild place survives – Umhlanga Lagoon Nature Reserve, which you can read about in Andrea's story **Between the Freeway and the Deep Blue Sea** on page 60.

Paul Morris

Author and photo-journalist **Paul Morris** is fascinated by the relationship between people and the natural environment, and how human history imprints itself on the landscape. In his book *Back to Angola* Paul chronicled his long-distance, unsupported bicycle tour through the former battlefields of that country. He writes about off-beat, off-the-beaten-track adventures and sometimes manages some "half-decent" photographs.
Paul likes to look beyond the 'myth' of the untouched wilderness to find the fading footprints of humanity. On a recent visit to the Pakhuis Pass in the Cederberg, he investigated the story of the grave of a British soldier killed during the Anglo-Boer War (read **The Englishman's Grave** on page 44).

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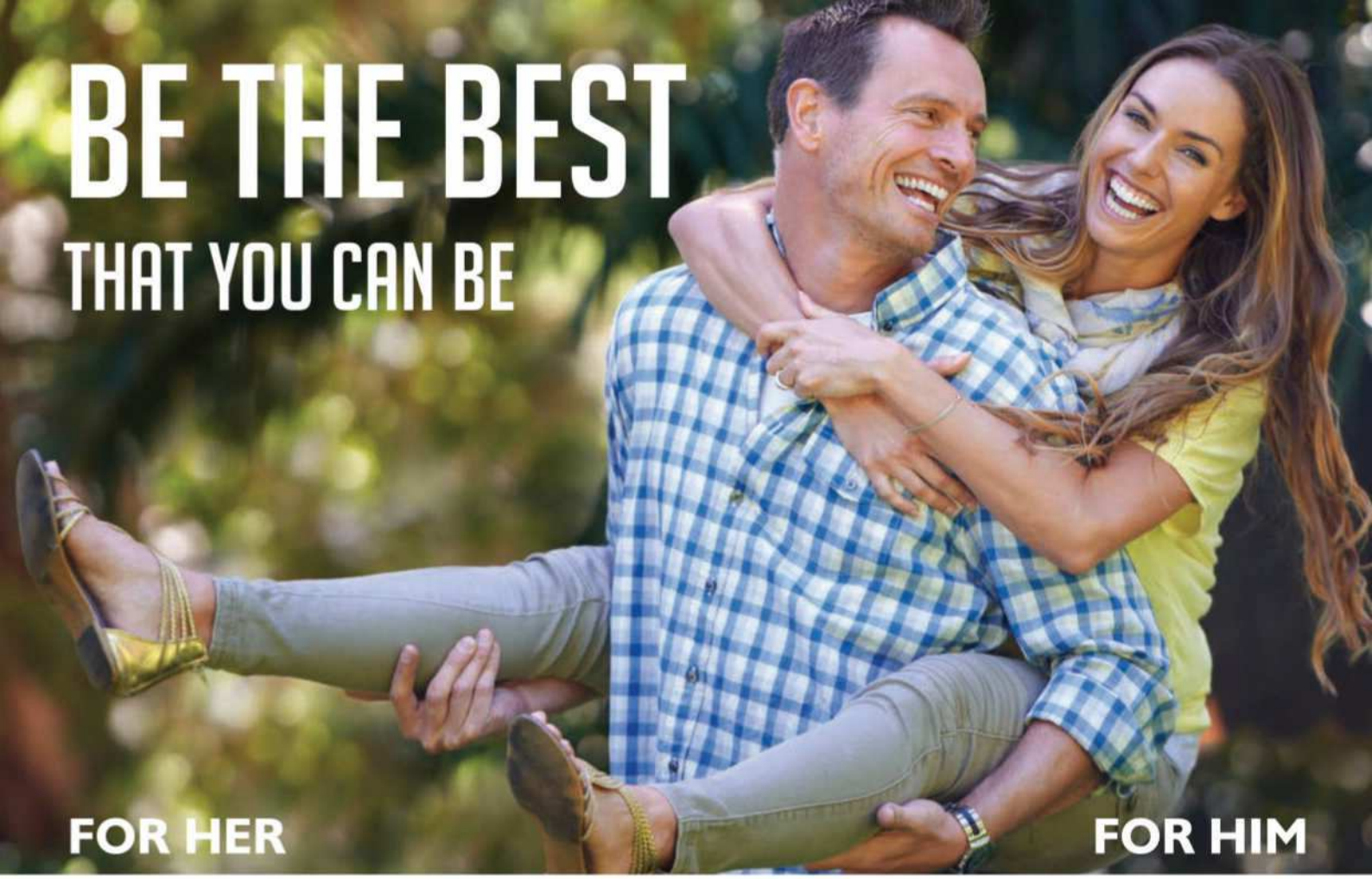

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IDEAL FOR DIABETICS

FOR HIM

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A strong immune system
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WINNING LETTER

A Lucky Sighting

I was travelling to Villiersdorp from Hermanus. Just before Theewaterskloof Dam, we spotted a pair of Blue Cranes close to the side of the road. We thought they had a little one, but could not see it. We stopped and I hopped out to take some quick shots thinking they would move off like they usually do. I could not see the chick through my lens so snapped away at the adults. I quickly took a handful of pics as I did not want to disturb or anger the birds and I got back in the car and travelled off to Villiersdorp for a well-earned lunch. When I got home, I loaded the photos onto my laptop, and low and behold, there was the little chick, probably only a few days old. To say I was excited about this lucky shot, would be an understatement. I believe it's quite rare to get a photo of a Blue Crane chick this young, so thought I'd share this moment with you. The camera used is a Nikon D7200 and the lens is a 150-600mm Sigma Sport lens. I used the auto setting, which is what I tend to use most of the time. I'm not a professional or full-time photographer, but love the thrill. (edited)

Derek Milne, via email

Congratulations

Derek Milne, your letter has won you a medley of Van Loveren red wines worth R1 200. The hamper includes the Cabernet Sauvignon Shiraz, Merlot and African Java Pinotage. For more information about Van Loveren, visit www.vanloveren.co.za, follow @VanLoverenWines on Twitter or find them on Facebook.

Punda's Secrets Revealed

I loved reading the article *Punda's Secrets* (April 2018), especially as I was there late last year and there was one bird that was definitely top of the list for the twitchers – the Orange-winged Pytilia. By fluke I got to see him. I was talking to a fellow camper when a younger guy walked up and informed us that there was an Orange-winged Pytilia at the birdbath, so I followed him (I didn't know where the birdbath was) and within a few minutes of arriving there he was, Mr Popular.

I call him Mr Popular as over the next few days I heard (overheard) countless conversations of people who had come solely to Punda just to see him. While I was swimming, two couples were searching around for the birdbath. I got out to show them where it was and they told me that they had travelled all the way from the Western Cape just to see the Orange-winged Pytilia. Well if ever there was a place to see one Punda's birdbath is definitely the place to go. Thanks to your article I'll be hanging out at the sheds on the Western side of camp cause I need my Bat Hawk lifer and to see him I'll be travelling from the Eastern Cape. The things we do for birding.

Dusty Elton, via email

Cry My Beloved Kruger

My family and I visited the Kruger Park over the Christmas and New Year holiday period. As always, we loved the park but were very sad to observe that the lawlessness prevalent in our country seems to have spilled over into Kruger. I am not talking about the scourge of rhino and elephant poaching but of the behaviour of visitors and, in particular, day visitors to the park. Speed limits and other rules are simply ignored.

On Christmas Day we drove from Shingwedzi to Babalala picnic site. There was heavy traffic towards Shingwedzi, sometimes convoys of ten or more vehicles, the majority of which obviously was exceeding the speed limit. At one point a group of cars was stopped and the occupants were viewing a large herd of elephant; the convoy did not attempt to slow down but sped past.

Back at camp, the day visitors' picnic site was packed with people, and was noisy and littered with rubble. There were also day visitors in the road at the picnic site who appeared to be intoxicated. On our sunset drive, which was on route H1-7 towards Punda Maria, we were repeatedly overtaken by cars travelling at high speed, and could only conclude the occupants had left the day visitors picnic site late and were now rushing to make the exit gate in time. We came across a vehicle that had overturned and our driver was told it was as a result of a burst tyre.

Despite this negativity, we had wonderful sightings, our sunset drives were fantastic, the driver/guides super, the ambience of the park around the braai fire amazing, and we all loved it. Our visit ended on a very sad note as the only rhino we saw had been poached the night before, just off the tar road not many kilometres from the Phalaborwa gate. All of us left with a great heaviness of spirit. (edited)

Celia Cloete, via email

Jolly Good Stuff

I enjoyed your feature on rooibos (March 2018), which brought back memories of an experience we had in London. It was our daughter's 32nd birthday and we decided to treat her to high tea at the Dorchester Hotel. The delicious petit fours, cakes, tarts, and beautifully cut, scrumptiously filled sandwiches certainly matched the opulent surroundings. We were served by a very smartly dressed young man in tails, and were most impressed as he relayed to us all the wonderful, exotic-sounding teas available, which promised to complete our experience.

At the end of the quite long list he said in his oh so cultured voice, "And we do have really refreshing tea called Redbush." We all looked at each other and in unison said, "REDBUSH… you mean ROOIBOS!" Needless to say, in a very British way he never batted an eyelid, but just smiled and served the tea. (edited)

Felicity Mason, via email

Sand Stories

I was intrigued to read, '*Desert Extraordinaire*', the article by Ron Swilling in the April 2018 issue of COUNTRY LIFE, since we visited these areas in 2007 and 2016. The image (below) is of us climbing Big Daddy Dune with my in-laws from London. One could add some worthwhile adventures south of Swakopmund such as viewing the 'Moon Landscape' features and *Welwitschia mirabilis* plants along Welwitschia Drive which flanks the Swakop river, and quad biking on the dunes between Swakopmund and Walvis Bay. Interestingly, the sexes of *Welwitschia mirabilis* are separate, i.e. there are male plants and female plants. The male cones are salmon-coloured, small, oblong cone-like structures and fertilisation is considered to be carried out by insects. The informative article has stimulated us to revisit this area again which we plan to do in the next few months.

Martin Briggs, via email

Can You Spot the Skull?

We are a pair of oldies who thoroughly enjoy COUNTRY LIFE every month. You can`t be expected to be anatomists, but over the years I have pointed out a couple of *blapse*; I remember a photo of a zebra eye that was printed upside down and ostrich pelvic bones called a skull. March 2018, page 75 has a photo of a hippo skull called (by implication) an elephant skull. I wonder how many readers spotted it? One hopes it wasn`t the guide`s identification.

Dr Chris Gow, via email

FACEBOOK

The feature on five unusual weekend breakaways caught the attention of more than 2 000 people.
For other fascinating articles, competitions, videos and useful facts, like us on Facebook @SACountryLife or visit www.countrylife.co.za for more stories from around the countryside.

THE WINNER OF OUR MARCH COMPETITION

CONGRATULATIONS

Penny Tomlinson from Magalies View. You have won a luxury stay at Fifty Seven Waterberg lodge in Welgevonden Game Reserve, valued at R25 800.

June Diary

Knysna Oyster Festival

Garden Route

It's ten days of fun, adventure, plenty of outdoor activity, live music, shows, comedy, exhibitions and, of course, the very best in oysters, which all add up to a stunning winter break for the family. Sports enthusiasts will revel in top cycling, e-biking and mountain-biking and running events.

044 382 5510, www.oysterfestival.co.za

29 June-8 July

Don't let the winter chill stop you from enjoying life in the countryside

Art & Craft Ramble

Wakkerstroom

Take the self-guided tour to studios of local and professional artists and crafters, and join a number of workskops – pottery, woodworking, felt making, drawing, cartoons, pastels, miniatures, cheese making, bread making and even a brewing course. Maps direct you to the halls, home studios and galleries.

083 452 3363, info@dekotzenhof.co.za

www.artramblewakkerstroom.co.za

15-17 June

15-17

Plett ARTS Festival

Garden Route

Enjoy this mix of music, theatre, fine art, fashion and design, documentaries, crafts and markets, and there is also a winter school. Five thought-provoking AFRIDOC films are showing on the big screen over three days.

www.pletttourism.com

25 June-9 July

9

Howick Trashion Show

KwaZulu-Natal-Midlands

Celebrate the creative use of waste at this exhibition at the Howick Agricultural Hall (11h00) of trash fashion, and wire and waste cars, designed by eco-conscious learners.

nikki@cowfriend.co.za

9 June

23-24

Christmas in Winter Festival

Tulbagh

Join the festivities in Tulbagh when the village is decorated with lights and Christmas trees, and the restaurants offer traditional Christmas dinners. There's a trail run through the vineyards and pony rides, scenic tractor trips up Oudekloof Pass, and plenty of family entertainment. Various arts, crafts and food stalls and exhibitions will be there to tempt you with local offerings – the perfect way to get those stockings filled early.

023 2301348/75, info@tulbaghtourism.co.za
ww.tulbaghtourism.co.za
23-24 June

8-17

Hermanus FynArts Festival

Overberg

Head for South Africa's whale-watching capital for this celebration of music, art and theatre. Enjoy an excellent programme line-up plus all the good food, wine and excellent bookshops this coastal town has to offer. There are also markets brimming with local produce. (Read *Welcome to Book Central* on page 56).

fynarts@hermanus.co.za, www.hermanusfynarts.co.za
8-17 June

8-10

Taste the Helderberg

Somerset West

Enjoy a winter celebration of fine food and wine from Helderberg farms and vineyards, at this annual showcase at the NH The Lord Charles Hotel just minutes from Cape Town. Sample the latest wine releases and some of the region's best on the Friday and venture out into the farms on Saturday and Sunday. This year, Taste the Helderberg is food theatre in the form of a mesmerising chocolate buffet installation. The funkiest-dressed couples will be rewarded for their innovative use of a touch of purple.

www.wineroute.co.za
8-10 June

5-6

Juliet Cullinan Wine Festival

Johannesburg

This is the most exclusive, longest-running wine festival in South Africa, showcasing the very best wines from Cape cellars. This year the festival moves to Hyde Park Shopping Centre, and also highlights the Chardonnay and Pinot Noir grapes grown in Burgundy.

www.julietcullinan.co.za
5-6 June

24

Delheim Jazz & Cheese Fondues

Stellenbosch

Head for this wine estate and get cosy over live jazz and a feast of wine and delicious cheese fondues. This series sees a collaboration between the local musicians of the Cape Town Music Academy, and Jazz in the Native Yards.

021 888 4600, www.webtickets.co.za
www.facebook.com/delheim
24 June

June Diary

16

Franschhoek Winter Wines Festival

Cape Winelands

The Franschhoek Motor Museum at L'Ormarins wine estate is just the setting for a lazy day in the sun. Live music plays throughout the day, Franschhoek vignerons showcase some of their top red wines, and there is plenty of delicious food. You can also enjoy the display of unique and exciting vehicles, motorcycles, bicycles and memorabilia in the museum.

021 876 2861, info@franschhoek.org.za

16 June

Kirkwood Wildsfees

Eastern Cape

Three days of 'Born to be Wild' experiences for the family are the perfect start to the winter holidays. In the scenic Sundays River Valley just outside Port Elizabeth, the festival offers 350 specialist food stalls, as well as a Christmas in July Santa's Workshop. Other annual favourites are the KidZone, the Walk on the Wildside experience, a *skaapkop langtafel*, mohair expo, cooking demonstrations, wine stalls, and agricultural and outdoor expos.

www.wildsfees.co.za

29 June-1 July

Silver Mountain Music Festival

Grootvaderbosch Valley

In this splendid valley between Swellendam and Heidelberg, spend a weekend of music among the scenery. Enjoy classical, swing and other upbeat sounds, and a series of conservation talks and walks, plus a cheese and milk tasting on a working dairy farm.

info@silvermountainmusic.co.za

www.silvermountainmusic.co.za

14-17 June

14-17

National Arts Festival

Eastern Cape

Comedy, theatre, dance, jazz or ballet, you'll find it in the hundreds of shows at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown. Take your pick and enjoy an array of productions, exhibitions, contemporary music, lectures, craft fairs, workshops, a children's art section and film.

www.nationalartsfestival.co.za

28 June-8 July

Napier Wine & Patatfees

Overberg

Note the expanded name of this festival – it now includes wine, in honour of the stunning wines that grow in the area. So get set for a rollicking time in this tiny Overberg town, with great food, fine wine, live music, local arts and crafts and fresh produce at a number of stalls, as well as the *Lang Arm Dans* and events for kids. Cape Town rock band Akkedis is giving a free concert in town at Café Max.

028 424 2584, www.napierwinepatatfees.co.za

15-17 June

Morgan's Bay Footprints Festival

Eastern Cape

Celebrate everything that is the best of this coastal area – live entertainment, a varied craft market, traditional dancing and much more, all brought to you by Morgan's Bay locals.

084 507 0973, www.footprintsfestival.com

22-24 June 2018

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June Diary

Melville Koppie Hikes

Johannesburg

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13-17

Port St Johns Umngazi Pondo Pedal

Eastern Cape

This exciting three-day mountain-bike challenge on the Wild Coast is set over three days of between 30 to 35 kilometres daily, each starting and finishing at Umngazi River Bungalows & Spa, 20 kilometres south of Port St Johns. Unique routes, with single track, jeep track, cattle paths and some sharp climbs and steep descents, lead through the rolling hills of the coast to the magnificent swamps of the Umngazana wetland.

031 764-1885, www.pondopedal.com 13-17 June 2018

24

SPAR Women's Challenge

Durban

One of the most iconic women's events on KwaZulu-Natal's sporting calendar, the challenge brings together women from all walks of life. It starts in Masabalala Yengwa Avenue just outside the finish venue at the Jonsson Kings Park outer fields. The 10km is part of the national SPAR Grand Prix series, while the 5km fun run is for all to enjoy.

www.sparwomensrace.co.za

24 June

Magalies Monster MTB Trail Run

Buffelspoort

Join the flock of adventure seekers at the ATKV Buffelspoort for some serious action in the Magaliesberg. All the ingredients of a truly South African challenge are here – spectacular scenery, technically challenging trails and a fantastic atmosphere.

www.stillwatersports.com

2-3 June

2-3

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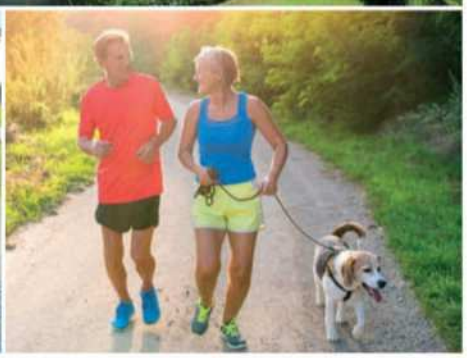

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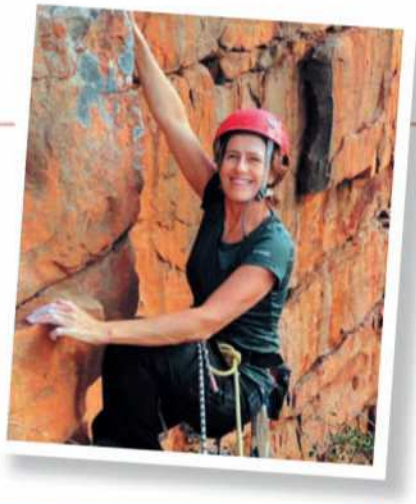
The countryside through our readers' eyes and lenses. Here are this month's four winning entries in our photographic competition

First Prize

A R1 000 voucher from Burblepix, which can be spent on photobooks, canvases and journals. Visit www.burblepix.co.za for more information.

I love it when a photographer thinks out of the box and creates something unusual. Well done, Willem, you certainly must have had a few challenges with this image taken on a night game drive in the Mashatu Game Reserve in Botswana. Fortunately chameleons aren't like Usain Bolt. They hang around long enough for one to focus and the picture is impressively sharp. Two images (one of the chameleon) the other of the moon) were automatically combined in-camera, making it not very easy to get the composition of the chameleon and the moon right. But here the composition is really comfortable to the eye, with both the chameleon and the moon sitting on the thirds' line.

PHOTOGRAPHER Willem Kruger
CAMERA Nikon D800, 70-200mm lens at 200mm
SETTINGS F2.8 at 1/60 sec, ISO 1000



The judge this month is regular contributor to COUNTRY LIFE **Shaen Adey**, whose work has taken her to some wild and very beautiful places. Shaen says she will always have a soft spot for wildlife and landscape images but that her lifestyle has pushed her towards extreme sports photography. It is similar to wildlife photography in many ways, she says, where precise timing, composition and excellent light all come together with a click of the button.

Second Prize

A R750 voucher from Burblepix, which can be spent on photobooks, canvases and journals. Visit www.burblepix.co.za for more information.

What a stunning image of three colourful Bee-Eaters perched on a branch. I particularly like the cleanness of the picture, no branches poking out all over the place and, more importantly, the use of limited depth of field which has effectively eliminated potential distractions in the background. My eyes are drawn straight into what matters, the pin-sharp and well-exposed little birds.

PHOTOGRAPHER Hennie Cilliers
CAMERA Canon EOS-1D Mark III, EF300mm +1.4x at 420mm
SETTINGS f5.6 at 1/4000 sec, ISO 800

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Third Prize

A R500 voucher from Burblepix, which can be spent on photobooks, canvases and journals. Visit www.burblepix.co.za for more information.

It's almost impossible not to get a great picture when you have a beautiful sunset on one hand, and a working Karoo farm on the other. The exposure is great, with the windmills and trees silhouetted against the moody sky, but there's still enough detail in the barn so the picture is not totally flat. What I like most about this farm scene (apart from being really colourful), is the tranquil feeling it gives me. I could happily be there, watching the sunset while sipping a gin and tonic and simply soaking it all up.

PHOTOGRAPHER Stu Bowie
CAMERA Canon EOS 50D, 24-105mm mm lens at 24mm
SETTINGS f6.3 at 1/80 sec, ISO 400

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ENTER OUR IMAGE CLUB COMPETITION Email your entry to imageclub@caxton.co.za or enter online at www.countrylife.co.za. Read the competition rules online or phone Carlyn on 011 889 0726 for an email copy.

Fourth Prize

A R250 voucher from Burblepix, which can be spent on photobooks, canvases and journals. Visit www.burblepix.co.za for more information.

Cute, cute, cute! Elephants are one of my favourite subject matters as the herds constantly interact with one another, and this image taken in Kruger National Park is no exception. Add a calf to the picture and you have a winner, especially when dwarfed and scaled by the adults. Apart from being incredibly cute, the position of the calf on the thirds' line makes it the main focus of the picture. Going a step further, the little fella is also the only complete creature while the rest of the elephants are all cropped, again enhancing what's important – the calf.

PHOTOGRAPHER Hilda le Roux
CAMERA Canon EOS 7D Mark II, EF70-200mm at 200mm
SETTINGS f5.6 at 1/400 sec, ISO 320

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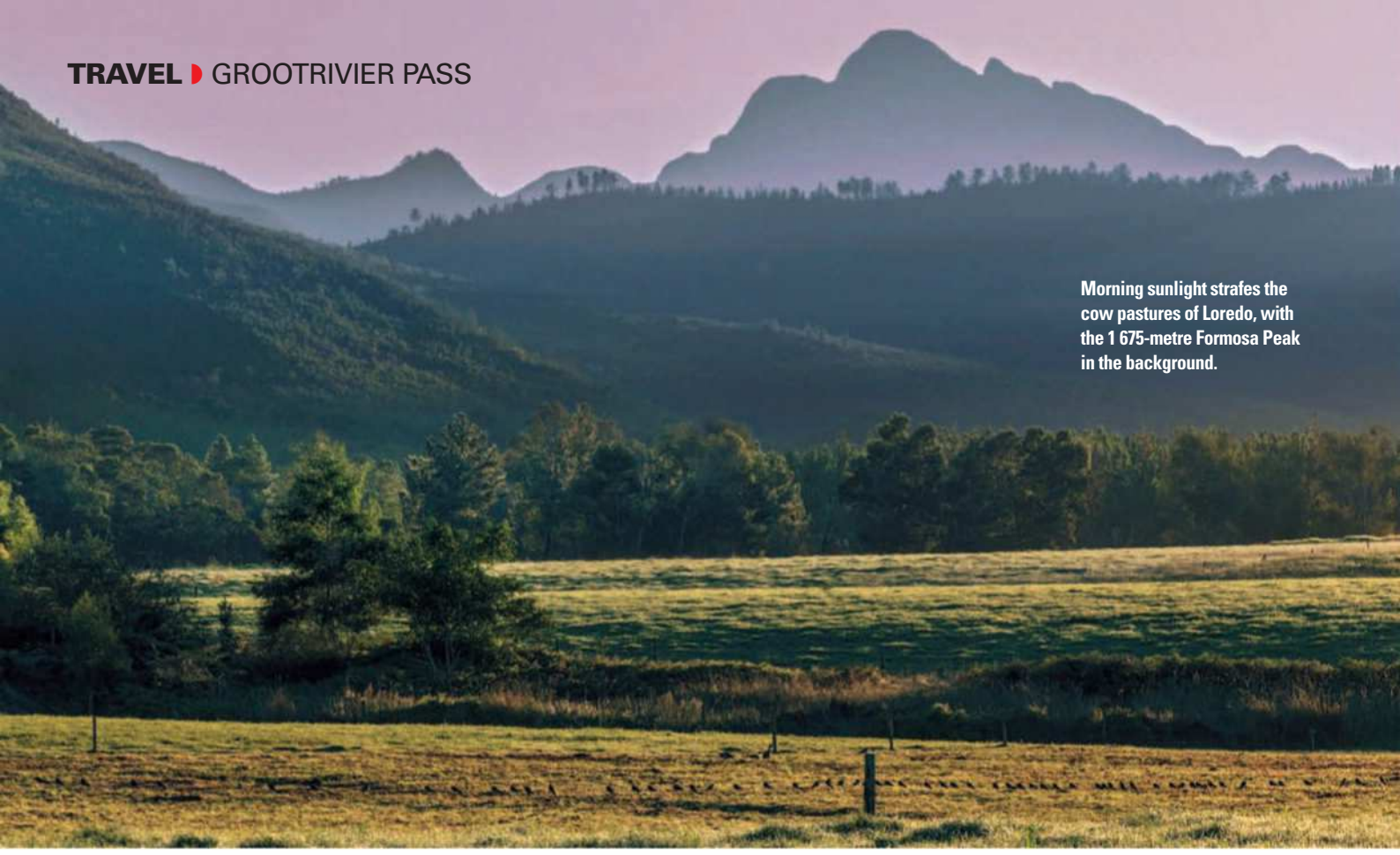
Up The Pass

No three words ring louder for Obie Oberholzer. Up. The. Pass. The Grootrivier Pass. From his home in Nature's Valley, up it leads through ancient yellowwoods to the plateau at the top. Where many things happen

THIS PAGE: The camera never lies. Proof of Farmer Wilson's day of mud and dung. **OPPOSITE:** As the day breaks over the Wilsons' Loredo Farm at the top of Grootrivier Pass, Snippe waits for Voda to finish drinking after the early morning milking session.

Voda



Morning sunlight strafes the cow pastures of Loredo, with the 1 675-metre Formosa Peak in the background.

Yes, no three words in my limited vocabulary ring so clear. They conjure up adventure and the yearning to set off on new journeys of discovery, to go beyond the regular, to follow and live new dreams.

Thus, with regularity, up the pass I must go. My wife and I say it often, "Just quickly going up the pass…" To Plett, to the Crags (to collect post), to fetch milk, to buy plants.

My parents used to say it when they lived here in Nature's Valley many years ago. In the early 1970s my father bought a plot in this coastal village for R5 000 and built a double-storey brick house for R6 000. In writing this I am so struck by the absurdity of these numbers that I spend the next two hours finding the papers in our disorderly archives. For there, indeed, written in fountain-pen ink, is a sepia-coloured document showing these exact amounts.

That's the moment Lynn walks in, catching me grinning widely. "Why are you grinning like that? It can only mean trouble," she says, rolling her eyes. "I am going up the pass," I roll back, "I am going to photograph up there." She slips on her worn Birkenstocks, "Well, I am coming with you."

So we climb into the bakkie and drive up the Grootrivier Pass. First it winds through some of the most pristine Afromontane forest on planet Earth, where the enormity of some of the old yellowwoods brings us great joy. These forests have been undisturbed for eons and are now part of the Tsitsikamma National Park.

At one point up the pass, the forest abruptly changes to Cape Fynbos. Somewhere around this stage, when taking our many European visitors up the pass, I pull up next to the fynbos, look knowingly smug and recite the following, "South Africa is home to one of the world's hottest hotspots, the Cape Floral Region. A World Heritage Site at the tip of Africa, this majestic floral kingdom of fynbos is one of six on Earth and is the only one to be fully contained within a single country. Incredibly, it has the highest known concentration of plant species in the world.

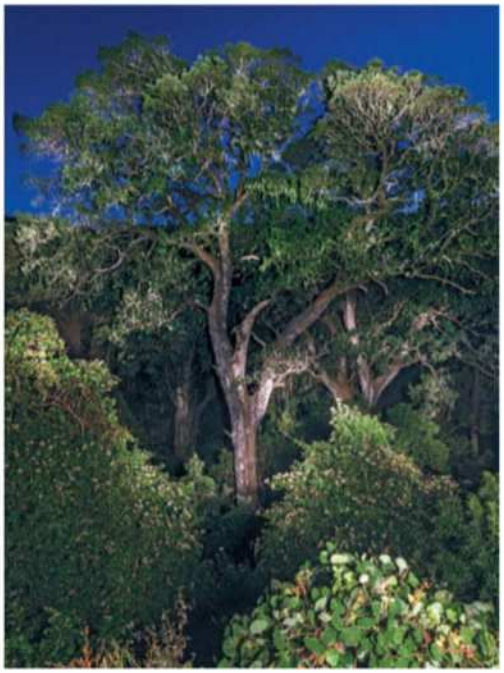
"Its nearest rival, the South American rain forest, has only one third the number of species. Even more remarkable is that 70 per cent of the Cape's impressive 9 600 plant species grow nowhere else on Earth."

After a few more sharp curves the pass swings onto a plain that rolls a carpet of green up to the Tsitsikamma Mountains in the distance. These meadows are so lush that, with the mountains in the background, they remind us each time of the Bavarian landscape that lies beneath the Alps, bringing back memories of the four years we lived in München in the early 1970s.

Down here in Africa, these pastures shimmer with green light, dotted at times by grazing Jersey cows. This is where the Wilsons work their dairy farm called Loredo. Every morning and afternoon since the early 1980s, the cows are herded from one of 20 camps and walked along the tar to be milked at the dairy.

During those long-ago days, I once had a new white car and every time I went up the pass I would return with a white car splattered with cow dung. Twice a day, this tarred regional road R102 is dotted with slimy, smelly, brown-green dung, every day of every year – till the cows come home.

In the beginning I used to call Mr Wilson 'Farmer Brown' because his gumboots were clogged with brown dung and his pants wore streaks of the same stuff. Our first conversation, in the early 1980s, was about cow dung. "Cattle manure," explained Peter Wilson, "is basically made up of digested grass and grain. Cow dung is high in organic materials and



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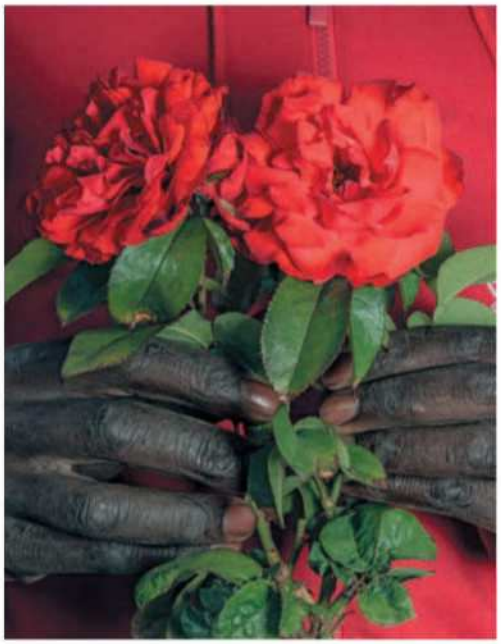


CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Chase the Collie gives me the once-over from the back of a farm bakkie. ● Inquisitive Jersey dairy cows push for a better view of a stupid photographer getting down to the low and muddy. ● A powerful hunting torch spotlights the Afromontane forests and an old yellowwood tree up the bends of the Grootrivier Pass. ● Zimbabwean Tina (Magogo) holds roses in the Loredo nursery. "Roses are red," I said. "And violets are blue," she replied. ● Lens flare brightens the morning light over a herd of Girlies on their way to their daily pasture after the first milking.

"So yes, my 200 girls add a little to global warming, but produce 3 400 litres of milk per day. It's like you driving up and down the Grootrivier Pass

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Judy and Peter Wilson, at their daughter Ann's wedding in the farm barn, find happiness in me holding up a snap of their own wedding in 1984. ● Godfrey Sibanda brings my brunch at the Natures Way Farm Stall. "Do you always smile?" I ask. "Yes," he says. "Even in my sleep." ● Cattle egrets enjoy the vistas from their perch on Natures Way Farm Stall. ● I see the freshly baked ciabatta and say, "I'd love some." My wife's voice echoes, "No, you're too fat." ● The 55-year-old Ferguson 'Vaaljapie' tractor keeps vigil over the stall's pre-dawn baking activities.

ABOVE: Kurland polo horses enjoy the damp morning grass in the paddocks below the Tsitsikamma Mountains.

rich in nutrients. It contains about three per cent nitrogen, two per cent phosphorus and potassium." I was dunged out for words.

Ten years later, I ran into him again, this time with clean pants and shoes. Why? Well, Mr. Wilson now had a dairy manager. This time I was well prepared and asked him whether cows contributed to global warming? I realised my mistake too late.

The dairy farmer breathed in deeply then exhaled in short puffs. He waved his brown arm over his green meadows and said, "Eating all this green grass bloats the 'Girlies' [as he lovingly calls his herd of 200 Jersey cows], so they tend to fart and burp a lot. Ha-ha (pause). Ha-ha (pause). Ha-ha (pause). A cow releases, on average, 70 to 120 kilograms of methane per year. Methane is a greenhouse gas like carbon dioxide. So yes, my 200 girls add a little to global warming, but produce 3 400 litres of milk per day. It's like you driving up and down the Grootrivier Pass."

The Loredo plateau has a number of private houses and places offering accommodation – Wild Spirit and Rocky Road backpackers, Lily Pond Country Lodge, Kurland Hotel, Loredo Farmstays and a campsite. By far the most special to us is the Natures Way Farm Stall.

My wife suffers from a condition I have come to call the 'Oh-yippy-let's-stop-at-this-farmstall' syndrome. Through the years we must have stopped at every farmstall in this our beloved land. Honestly, after 40 years of farmstall stopping, I can't see another koeksister, or some fudge or home-baked cookies. I'd rather just drive into the sunset or, even better, talk dung and cow farts to Farmer Wilson.

We regularly collect our milk from this beauty of a place, thriving on the ambience that surrounds this real farmstall, edged on one side by the Wilsons' nursery and dairy, southwards by tall indigenous forests and, on the other side, the pastures of Loredo spreading their greenness all around to the Tsitsikamma Mountains.

To the east, Peak Formosa at 2 000 metres lifts above the shoulders of the other mountains. One morning, while having breakfast on the farmstall veranda, I picked up a conversation at the next table where Mrs Wilson was holding cow with a German family.

But, sorry, let me first say that Judy Wilson manages the farmstall and is one of those efficient, organised and superbly strong women. On one occasion, I told her that she was a very fine and lovely lady. She shrieked with delight and motioned to throw her strong arms around me, which made me falter backwards into Maxwell who was stacking newly baked Ciabatta and seed bread.

Right, so back to her talking cow with the happy German family who thought they were back in the rolling hills of Southern Bavaria. "All our Girlies," said Mrs Wilson, waving her strong arms towards the herd being herded along (and dunging up) the R102, "are pasture fed Kikuyu grass based with clovers oversown with rye. Each cow has a full history and family tree."

At this stage, her conversation was interrupted by Godfrey, the finest of all Afro-Africans from Zimbabwe, bringing a breakfast of croissants filled with bacon and scrambled egg, garnished with tomato and grated cheese. Judy Wilson talked on, "All of our Jersey dairy cows are inseminated artificially, mostly with imported semen from proven European bulls."

For a few moments, the country air was quiet, almost edible. "*But-but aber entschuldigung*", apologised the father of the German family, "But-but why can't you use the South African bulls?" Just then a white car passed down the country R102 and slowly

ABOVE: Pig the farmstall icon enjoys a time of pleasure and relaxation.

changed from white into a splattered cow-dung green.

Judy Wilson's answer rang out sternly, "Because the South African Bulls are all blue." The Germans stared blankly into the pastures, and at the next table a farmer from upcountry snorted out a laugh.

Besides the tourists and locals that pass here, there are calves in various pens, Girlies about to calf in other paddocks, goats and chickens and cats and silly little bunny rabbits jumping around, and Pig. Pig is an enormous being, the Natures Way mascot, an institution, a circus act, a superhero who lives in the field in front of the farmstall.

Pig's fame has now stretched around the world. Born the runt of a litter of piglets from a wild African bushpig father and a domestic pig mother, Piggy grew up bottle fed, in the Wilson's farmhouse. When he grew so big that he started to knock over furniture, he was moved to the field in front of the farmstall, where he now happily snorts out his life with his best friend, Calf. At the side of his camp, a hard broom is provided for personal pig scratching by kind human beings.

Turning left out of the farmstall, the road leads past the track to the Wilson's farmhouse. A Scotsman, Lorrie Read, built it in 1886 (hence Lo-re-do). Mr Read was said to have been quite a bull, fathering nine children. The original double-storey house has thick mud-brick walls, yellowwood ceilings and floors, and a curved staircase with a balustrade carved out of hard pear wood.

Until the turn of the century, the house was a stagecoach halt on the Knysna-Port Elizabeth route, the arrival of the coach heralded by a bugle. Bordering Loredo are the polo fields and pastures of Kurland estate.

The original farmhouse on Kurland was once the home of the legendary Nicky Behr, a descendant of Baron Peter Behr from the Duchy of Kurland that no longer exists, but once was in today's Latvia. The greater family owned several castles – one the spectacular Scheck Castle – before they had to flee the country.

This gracious old farmhouse at Kurland was transformed into a magnificent country hotel. Oak-lined roads lead along white-fenced fields through landscapes typical of East Yorkshire. I stop there and ponder. Coming up the pass from Nature's Valley, one travels through temperate African forests, the fynbos biome, the rolling Bavarian-type pastures and hills of Loredo, and the English landscapes of Kurland.

With my pixels running wild, my breathing quick and my imagination stretched, I see a pretty cross-legged Frauline oozing almost everything, next to me. The seat is old and worn, but she is young and taut. Taking a deep breath, I explain to her, while running my hand along the peaks of the Tsitsikamma range, "Tsitsikamma is a Khoisan word, meaning Place of Much Water. The national park that starts beyond the Loredo Plains incorporates 80 kilometres of rocky coastline with spectacular sea and landscapes, a remote mountainous region with secluded valleys and deep river ravines. Mmm… mmm… , would you like to come down the pass with me?" A flock of hadidas flies past and destroys all romantic thoughts.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: All the fresh produce you could wish for, at Natures Way. ● I ask Judy Wilson what kind of chickens these are and she smiles. "Real farm skrop-scratch with about as much breeding as my husband." ● A young goat pores over the selection of snacks brought along by a visitor. ● "Don't do it, Lalla," I say. "Don't do it." Then she does it, and slobbers her long grey tongue over my camera lens.

My wife Lynn now sits next to me, rolling her eyes and with a knowing smirk.

We drive on to photograph the Wilson's new wedding venue, a long, tall barn between the forests and the pastures, with a wooden farmhouse for farmstays, and self-catering cottages. Next day, at the first milking on a low-light morning, I find myself walking with the Girlies, notepad in hand, writing down the names on their ear tags. Each ear has a tag, so I enjoy the double here and the double there. This is not a pub crawl but a cow crawl.

Beneath me my legs are sliding on mud and dung, something squelching through my sandals, through my toes, streaking upwards till I even have some on my hands. There is Double Brandy, and Double Dot. Bar One, Fiasco, Amorous, Zuma, Skunk, Godiva, Tickle, Ditsy, Moo, Milky, Mos-Cow and Erect. All double of course. I double pat Amorous, stroke Girlie Godiva, scratch Tickle but miss out Zuma because she is partially covered in dung. I find that Erect has only one ear tag and wonder if it has been ripped off in a scuffle with a Blue Bull?

Just as I am enjoying all the patting and slapping and spanking, Farmer Wilson arrives and steps out of his big Land Cruiser, cleanly dressed, his hair neatly combed probably by his wife. Milky and a few other cows moo their greetings and the cattle egrets in the tall dead eucalyptus look down, flutter a bit, then fly away to other fields.

To top it all, Peter Wilson says nothing, just looks at the green cow dung up my legs, and grunts out those long, double, guttural bursts of laughter. You know, hugely irritating, like "Ha-ha (pause). Ha-ha (pause). Ha-ha (pause)." Then he drives into the sunrise and I slowly drive down the pass. ■

Map reference G4 see inside back cover

Handy Contacts

Natures Way Farm Stall
natureswayfarmstay@gmail.com,
www.naturesway-sa.com
Loredo Farm and accommodation
loredo@global.co.za
Kurland Hotel and Polo Estate www.kurland.co.za
Lilypond Country Lodge www.lilypond.co.za
Wild Spirit Backpackers Lodge
www.wildspiritlodge.co.za
Rock Road Backpackers
www.rockyroadbackpackers.com
Tsitsikamma Sunrise
www.tsitsikamma-caravanpark.co.za

The Centre of the Universe

… is how residents of Sedgefield describe their village. MIKE SIMPSON finds out why

PICTURES JEANETTE SIMPSON, OLIVEPINK PHOTOGRAPHY AND SUPPLIED

Let's be clear; I love Sedgefield, the village located midway between George and Knysna on the Garden Route. I've been visiting the village for many years and have become a fan of the great beaches, many waterways and the laid-back community vibe. But it can be an acquired taste, and many of the people who travel the N2 that dissects the CBD are less than impressed initially.

"It's a hole," says a friend, who has never turned off the N2 to explore what's on offer, and bases her opinion on the view from a car window. Bomber Webb, the editor of *The Edge* newspaper in Sedgefield, once had a similar attitude. "I told my wife she should shoot me if I ever decided to settle here," he recalls. "I thought, like a lot of people, that Sedgefield just consisted of the main road and a few scattered shops."

He's now been here for 18 years and wouldn't be anywhere else than in this village of about 8 000 people. "It's only when you start looking that you realise what Sedgefield has. There are more – and better – beaches than Knysna, for example, and there's a great community spirit."

Talk to the locals and the sense of community is much in evidence. Perhaps it's best encapsulated in the Slow Town ethos. Sedgefield prides itself on being South Africa's first Slow Town, an Italian concept that's about avoiding the rush, enjoying life and encouraging people to stop and smell the

ABOVE LEFT: Mosaic fish at the mouth of the Sedgefield Lagoon. Gericke's Point, a well-known local landmark, is in the background. LEFT: Business hours in Sedgefield can be flexible, depending on mood.

ABOVE: Tourism bookings officer Nicole Moore (left) and tourism manager Belinda Hobson provide useful information to visitors at the local tourism office.
ABOVE RIGHT: Bomber Webb, editor of *The Edge* newspaper, once thought the village wasn't worth a second glance. Now he's a committed Sedgefielder.
BELOW: Surrounded by water – including five beaches, a lagoon and a freshwater lake – Sedgefield has an impressive aerial view.

proverbial roses. There's now a regular Slow Town Festival here that typically takes place over the Easter Weekend.

Tourism manager Belinda Hobson is understandably enthusiastic about everything that Sedgefield has to offer. "We're a lovely seaside village surrounded by beaches, lakes and sand dunes covered in fynbos. We're known for our pristine beaches, water sports like kite surfing and canoeing, and for our excellent paragliding. If it's outdoors, it's out here."

Indeed, paragliders floating serenely under multi-coloured canopies are a common sight over the village. "We're one of the best African destinations for paragliding," Belinda tells us. "We do a lot of international training of paragliders. People will come here for two weeks to learn to paraglide. It's a safer place to learn to fly than the likes of the Swiss Alps. It's also cheaper."

Sedgefield may also have another claim to fame, as a hotspot for mosaic art. Outside the tourism office in the main road is a giant mosaic tortoise called Slow, but if you wander around town you'll find everything from mosaic benches to fish, an orca, and even a giant octopus that forms the centrepiece of an interactive and child-friendly mosaic garden.

The mosaics are the brainchild of Masithandane, a local non-profit organisation that cares for people in need, ranging from young children to the elderly. According to chairperson Jacky Weaver, creating the artworks fulfils the dual need of skills transfer and job creation. "People learn how to do the wire work inside the artworks, how to weld, how to attach the glass-fibre shells, and then how to apply the mosaics."

Apart from public mosaic projects funded by the likes of the National Lotteries Commission, there are now also many privately funded projects that add to job- and income-creation. "We want to be the mosaic capital of Africa," says Jacky enthusiastically.

For some, cars are works of art too. Just off the N2 is one of the village's unsung attractions, Sedgefield Classic Cars. Run by petrolhead Sheridan Renfield for the past 12 years, it entices a steady stream of visitors

LEFT: A peaceful scene on the Island, the suburb overlooking the lagoon. BELOW LEFT: Cape Town visitors Lula and Leo Hattingh play on the giant mosaic octopus at the Sedgefield Community Mosaic Interactive Park. BELOW: Jacky Weaver, chairperson of local NPO Masithandane, poses with Slow, the mosaic tortoise. She'd like to see Sedgefield known as the mosaic capital of Africa.

ABOVE LEFT: A paraglider enjoys soaring over Sedgefield. The village is well known as a training location for international paragliding students. ABOVE: Joe and Louisa Groenewald, seen here with long-serving employee Silvia Nkulu, have been making scrumptious pies at the Steam Whistle Stop for more than 20 years. BELOW: Sheridan Renfield of Sedgefield Classic Cars. His premises attract plenty of visitors and his cars are sold nationally.

to view its 60-plus collection of pre-war and post-war machines that range from VW Beetles and Kombis to Alfa Romeos and even a Rolls-Royce. Sheridan welcomes callers and says it's not unusual for tour buses to stop there.

A refugee from Johannesburg, who was lured by Sedgefield's lack of industry, Sheridan first worked in the tourism sector before returning to his first love, cars. He agrees that a relatively isolated Garden Route village is an unexpected location for a car dealership specialising in niche-market vehicles.

"Technology helps me. We get a lot of sales via the Internet," he says. "People from across South Africa are happy to buy our cars without ever seeing them in the metal because they trust the very accurate and honest information that we give on the website." His favourite car on the lot? "I can't tell you that," he says confidentially, "the other cars will hear me."

Not far down the road we find more Gauteng exiles, this time from Pretoria. Joe and Louisa Groenewald – known unofficially as 'Joe Pie' and 'Louisa Pie' – run one of the local institutions, the Steam Whistle Stop.

ABOVE: Turning elephant pooh into profit. Owner André Knoetze at the entrance to Scarab Paper. TOP RIGHT: Gauteng holidaymakers Kerrin Meerholz (nearest camera), and Ryan and Tyla Meerholz, with Jeanette Delport, explore the rock pools at Swartvlei Beach. ABOVE: Saturday is market day and attracts huge crowds, particularly during holiday season.

They're known for their chicken and pepper-steak pies, as well as Cornish pasties. They also have the distinction of operating from a railway station that's been without a train since the devastating Garden Route floods of 2007.

Every day from 1997 to November 2007, they catered to passengers arriving on the steam train running between George and Knysna. Then one night the floods came and destroyed the tracks. The train hasn't run since, although there are hopes of a return by the end of this year.

"Our life changed in one night, as about 75 per cent of our business came from the train. It was very scary," recalls Louisa. "Luckily we have awesome locals and they supported us by offering us premises in town where we could sell our pies. Some people even gave us money."

Today, Steam Whistle Stop pies are as popular as ever and the couple say they haven't regretted their decision to leave the jewellery industry and relocate to Sedgefield. "Here, our children grew up as normal kids, going to school barefoot, eating fruit from the trees, playing tok-tokkie," says Joe.

Some people here make a living from pies, but others make it from pooh. Scarab Paper is surely the most unusual attraction in the village and makes its living selling paper and artworks made from recycled elephant dung. "No, it doesn't smell," says owner André Knoetze, explaining that a scarab is an Egyptian dung beetle and the Garden Route is an ideal location for an industry like this because of the presence of two elephant reserves from which the raw product can be sourced.

"It's not widely known that elephant dung is ideal for course-fibre paper," says André. "Artists like this fibre as you can use pencil, ink, oil, acrylic, whatever on it and it doesn't smudge. We sell the paper to artists, and my wife Rita, an artist herself, creates artworks that we reproduce as postcards or prints.

"We are the only company that prints on elephant-dung paper on a commercial scale and we distribute worldwide. The demand for our postcards and limited-edition prints, particularly wildlife prints, is very strong."

The manufacturing process is fascinating and involves mixing a small quantity of ellie pooh with shredded paper to form a pulp. This is treated, washed and passes through 25 processes before the finished product is sold to people as far afield as Britain and the United States. "There's great novelty value," André tells us.

If ellie-pooh paper is the most unusual attraction in Sedgefield, then the village's three markets are surely the most popular. On any Saturday morning you'll see remarkably large

ABOVE LEFT: Susan Garner (left) and Rose Brettell run the Wild Oats community farmers' market. It's the oldest of the village's three very popular markets. ABOVE CENTRE: Real estate agent Mario Ferreira says high demand has seen local property prices rise by 23 per cent a year. ABOVE RIGHT: Sedgefield resident, Demi-Leigh Nel-Peters, during a parade through the village to honour her crowning as 2017 Miss Universe.

crowds thronging each market, the oldest of which is Wild Oats.

Run by Rose Brettell and Susan Garner – known locally as Susie Wild and Rosie Oats – it's been operating as a food and farmers market since 1999 and offers about 70 stalls, a number that the ladies feel is manageable. "We don't allow stallholders willy-nilly to join the market," explains Susan. "We carefully select them based on what they want to sell and what is already being sold at the market. We may also pick people based on enthusiasm."

The policy is to sell only locally produced products – even Cape Town is considered 'foreign' – with an emphasis on healthy, organic produce. Despite the enormous crowds the market attracts, the pair are steadfast that it should be open for only four hours each Saturday. "We could be open for longer, but then people just trickle in all day. We want to create an 'event' where sales are explosive for our stallholders," says Rose.

And the biggest thing to hit the town? Bomber Webb says it's surely the crowning of Sedgefielder Demi-Leigh Nel-Peters as Miss Universe 2017 in Las Vegas in November. Everyone seems to have a Demi-Leigh story. "My son dated her," someone tells us. "My daughter went to school with her," says another. "My daughter had her photo taken with her," we're told by a third.

So, for now, it seems that little Sedgefield really is at the centre of the universe. ■

Map reference G4 see inside back cover

Making elephant dung paper in Sedgefield

Go to www.countrylife.co.za

LEFT: The Island is a popular residential suburb overlooking the lagoon, where tortoises and birds are a common sight.

Tuck In

Trattoria da Vinci (044 343 1867) in the main road offers high-quality evening dining with an Italian theme. For a casual vibe visit the **Pili-Pili Beach Bar** at Myoli Beach for daytime and evening meals 044 343 3087.

Sleep In

The **Sedgefield Arms** offers luxury self-catering cottages and apartments close to the centre of town (044 343 1417), as does the adjacent **Pelican Lodge Guesthouse** (044 343 3283). For more options contact Sedgefield Tourism 044 343 2007.

Get Out and About

Sedgefield has a wide range of activities for outdoor enthusiasts, including canoeing and paragliding. There are also numerous shops selling everything from antiques to decor items. Sedgefield Tourism for more info.

Property Peep

There's a shortage of quality property, says estate agent Mario Ferreira of Chas Everitt, and prices are escalating at about 23 per cent a year. Beach- and lagoon-side properties are particularly sought-after, but prices are generally more affordable than in Knysna and Wilderness. Prices vary from just over R1-R30 million for exclusive Myoli Beach and Cola Beach.

Downhill Racers

DALE MORRIS and his son Sam don their first-time skis on the slippery slopes of Tiffindell. Sam rises to the occasion with aplomb, but Dale's Olympic slalem dreams lie in tatters

PICTURES DALE MORRIS AND SUPPLIED BY TIFFINDELL
WWW.DALERMORRIS.COM

LEFT: Tsotane Dywili is never more at home than when careening down a ski slope. ABOVE: Tiffindell is a traditional alpine-style ski resort with chalets, heated homes, cabins, an après-ski club, restaurants and a training and medical centre. BELOW: At Tiffindell, a frozen pond overlooks an alpine meadow.

There are tons of us in South Africa who have never clapped eyes on snow. Yes, we get some seasonal snowfalls in certain areas but they're not reliable enough for planning a holiday.

"But I want to do that," wailed my ten-year-old son Sam one morning last winter, as we watched a weatherman on TV wading up to his waist in crisp snow. 'Reporting live from Ceres' read the scrolling caption at the bottom of the screen.

I would have loved nothing more than to say, "Well kid, let's jump into the car and drive the 1 000-kilometre round trip. I'll book the accommodation and take the necessary time off work to make it happen. Hopefully, it won't have melted by the time we get there." But the notice was too short. It always is.

Sam cried passionately to the skies that life was unfair and his dad was a meanie. "We could go to the Alps or Aspen," he implored me. "You're prepared to sell a kidney to cover those costs?" I asked. I felt bad, and retired to my computer to research cheap skiing holidays and budget-friendly snow shacks abroad. Predictably, there were none.

But I did chance on Tiffindell Ski Resort, with guaranteed snow right here in the Eastern Cape. And so I booked it, informed my son, and we were on our merry way to the beautiful Southern Drakensberg.

"How can they promise snow?" asked my son as we slowly navigated the steep and

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Tiffindell's Winter Sports Academy trains young South Africans to become professional competitive skiers. ● Sam Morris attempts his first snow angel. ● If snow is absent in winter, snow cannons are used to keep Tiffindell's slopes white. ● Tsotane Dywili is a professional competitive skier and a full-time instructor at Tiffindell.

winding track to the resort. At 2 720 metres above sea level, Tiffindell often gets snow in winter and, if it doesn't, high-tech snow cannons do the job.

As we turned a corner near the end of the road, we found ourselves eyeing a vista of snow, a sparkling sheet draped across a glen surrounded by ice-clad peaks. Up on the rise a few kilometres away were the huts and chalets of Tiffindell Ski Resort.

"Stop the car," shrieked Sam. "I want to feel it." We jumped out and were soon whooping, running and kicking through the deepest patches, much to the concern of a pair of blanket-clad Lesotho herdsmen.

We were shown to our central-heated ski cabin and introduced to the man we hoped would shape us into Olympic downhill skiing champions. His name was Tsotane Dywili, a ski champion himself who has in past years represented South Africa in world championships in Austria and Germany.

"I came 26th out of 158," he told me, when I asked about his slalom achievements. A mighty fine feat considering that the 132 athletes he bested all came from pro-skiing nations in Europe, Asia and the States.

Tsotane hails from the Eastern Cape village of Rhodes. "I ended up skiing mostly because of Tiffindell. It's the only proper ski resort in Southern Africa, with ski lifts, and permanent snow during the three-month winter season."

He explained the Ski Pups programme facilitated by Tiffindell. "Youngsters, mostly local, come here to learn to ski, and the good ones are selected for our Winter Sports Academy, which then channels them into professional competition."

He pointed to the slopes above the resort, where I could see a bunch of local kiddies, zigzagging to and fro like little bullets on skis. "This year's Ski Pups," said Tsotane. "If you're selected for the academy, you spend the season up here training every day."

Alex Heath, the first African to compete in all five Olympic alpine events, is the

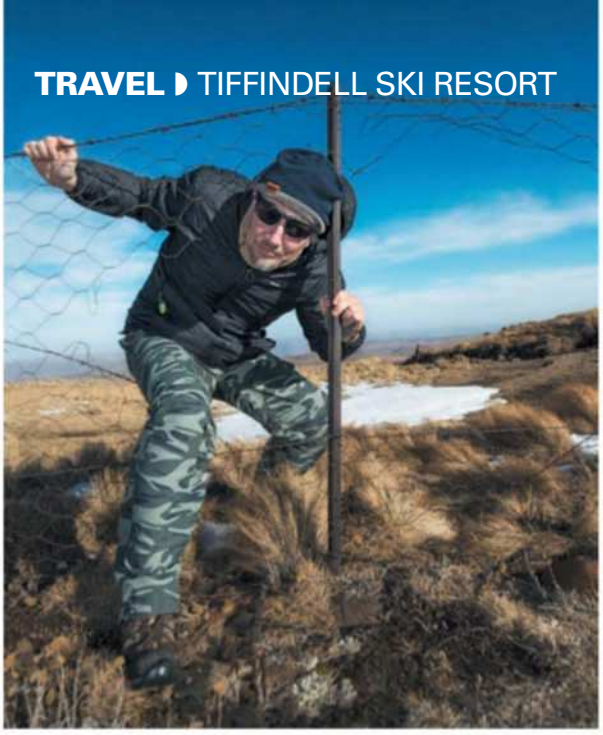
CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: A view of the Tiffindell ski resort from atop the highest ski slope. ● South African Olympic skier Alex Heath heads up the official winter sports academy at Tiffindell. ● Tiffindell's resident mascot bounds through the snow. ● Jeremy the snowman.

dedicated director of the programme. He personally coaches all the academy hopefuls every morning, and his mom, a qualified school teacher, takes care of their school education in the afternoons.

"Maybe little Sam here will catch Alex's eye," said Tsotane, pointing to the man instructing a team of spandex-clad youths at the top of the highest Tiffindell slopes. "Your lessons begin in the morning but, until then, enjoy your afternoon here at the resort."

After lunch, we explored the surrounding countryside, the highlight a stroll up the 3 000-metre snowy slopes of Ben Macdhui. En route, we visited the first frozen lake my son had seen and built our first snowman together. "Let's call him Jeremy," said Sam, as we gathered stones from beneath the snow for his eyes, nose and mouth.

It wasn't the best snowman I had laid eyes on (it might well have been the worst) but, as far as Sam was concerned, Jeremy was awesome (even when most of his teeth fell out).



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: The author slips into Lesotho through its porous border fence. ● There are always instructors on hand to help you learn to ski or to hone your existing skills ● Ski boots like something from an Iron Man movie. ● A staff member waxes some skis at the Tiffindell gear-rental shop.

At the top of the mountain, we were greeted by howling wind and sleet, and a flimsy wire fence that demarcates the border between South Africa and Lesotho. Ahead lay a bleak yet beautiful landscape of grassland and mountain peaks.

"I've got an idea," said Sam, crawling through a sizeable hole in the fence, and into foreign territory. And so commenced our cross-border snowball fight, he in Lesotho and I in South Africa. Naughty but fun, and then the cold just got too much for us and we headed back to our warm lodge.

Next morning, we were measured for our rental gear, and given all-in-one thermal jumpsuites, gloves and hats, and a set of futuristic boots that took us about 45 minutes to get into. We then received our skis, freshly waxed and smelling of doused candles. 'All the better to glide with, like liquid mercury, across the snowy slopes…'

Well, those were my thoughts as I envisioned myself, sliding with molten grace, the skis an extension of my body and mind, the snow a conduit for dexterous velocity. Reality, however, proved less elegant.

"Please try to stay upright," said Tsotane not for the first time, as I careened into the padded crash barrier at the end of the junior ski run. Our first lesson focused on the all-important snowplough manoeuvre – the skier comes to a controlled stop by angling his heels outwards, skis inwards. It's a simple but important technique because it's what slows you down and prevents you from reaching terminal velocity.

Sam grasped the concept very quickly. I, however, did not. Time after time, I sidled to the top of the baby slope and, time after time, ended up at the bottom, a crumpled pile of limbs and skis.

We kept at it all morning, but the simplest of skills remained elusive to me. Small children were besting me. Sam was showing me up. Other students were progressing with aplomb. I finally threw in the towel when a geriatric glided past me and came to an artful stop at the bottom of the slope. "Has he been skiing for long?" I asked Tsotane, in awe of this old gent. "Nope," he replied. "It's his first lesson."

Over lunch and a few rounds of consoling Glühwein, Tsotane explained to me that learning to ski was easy for some, and not so easy for others. He pointed through the restaurant window at the bustle on the slopes. There were plenty of instructors and students out there, many controlling their speed, turning when needed and stopping when they wanted to. Then there were the others, falling like autumn leaves.

And so I persisted, and that afternoon mastered the art of the snowplough.

TOP LEFT: There is quite some wildlife to be seen in the mountains around Tiffindell, including the rare Bearded Vulture. TOP RIGHT: Heavy snow is not uncommon up at Tiffindell. ABOVE: Young kids are winched to the top of the learners slope.

"It's for your own protection, and for the safety of others," Tsotane told me. As a small child, I never was able to do the splits, but I sure was able to now. Onlookers began to gather

Of course, by then Sam had not only conquered the breaks, but was turning like a pro, even confident enough to do little jumps and stunts. I felt immensely proud of him.

The following day, Sam had already progressed to the second-level runs, and was having a great time skiing at velocity, while tightening his turns. I, however, languished no further than on the 'remedial' slope. "It's for your own protection, and for the safety of others," Tsotane told me. As a small child, I never was able to do the splits, but I sure was able to now. Onlookers began to gather.

Come the third day, things started clicking into place. For Sam, it was finesse, style and speed. For me, it was ribs, vertebrae and knee joints. I felt stiffer than a frozen turkey and as inelegant as an octopus out of water.

It was time to instruct Tsotane to cease wasting his time with me, and rather help Sam onto the higher slopes. I duly retired to the sidelines (much to the disappointment of my fans on the benches), and applauded and encouraged my son instead.

Now, I'm not sure if it was the Glühwein that spurred me on, or the sight of a somewhat overweight lady flowing gracefully down the higher slope, but suddenly I was overcome with a bout of courage and self-determination. Our last afternoon at Tiffindell was drawing to an end and, if I didn't give it a last shot, never would I try it again.

And so, without careful reflection, I found myself being tugged to the top of the higher slope by a winch-driven rope lift, and launched downhill like an Olympic pro. It was exhilarating. The rushing wind, the swoosh of snow. I took a steep turn, but barely in control, and as I approached the end of the run realised that, indeed, I wasn't in any form of control.

I left the slope and took to the air, head first, like a bird, like a kite, like the wind. As I flew, in slow motion, free from gravity, I decided this would be the apex of my skiing career, and that I would use such a literal high point to retire from the world of skiing.

And there I lay, for the final time, entwined in the loving embrace of my new best friend the crash barrier, my exposed butt upsetting the assemblage of mothers with small children. To bring even more cheer, my son swooshed to a dramatic halt next to my mangled form and smiled. "Don't be sad, dad. At least *I* got the hang of it." ■

Map reference E6 see inside back cover

Tiffindell Ski Resort
011 781 2620, www.tiffindell.co.za

Pakhuis Mojo

You'll find it on a back road that climbs from Clanwilliam into the Cederberg's rugged wilderness

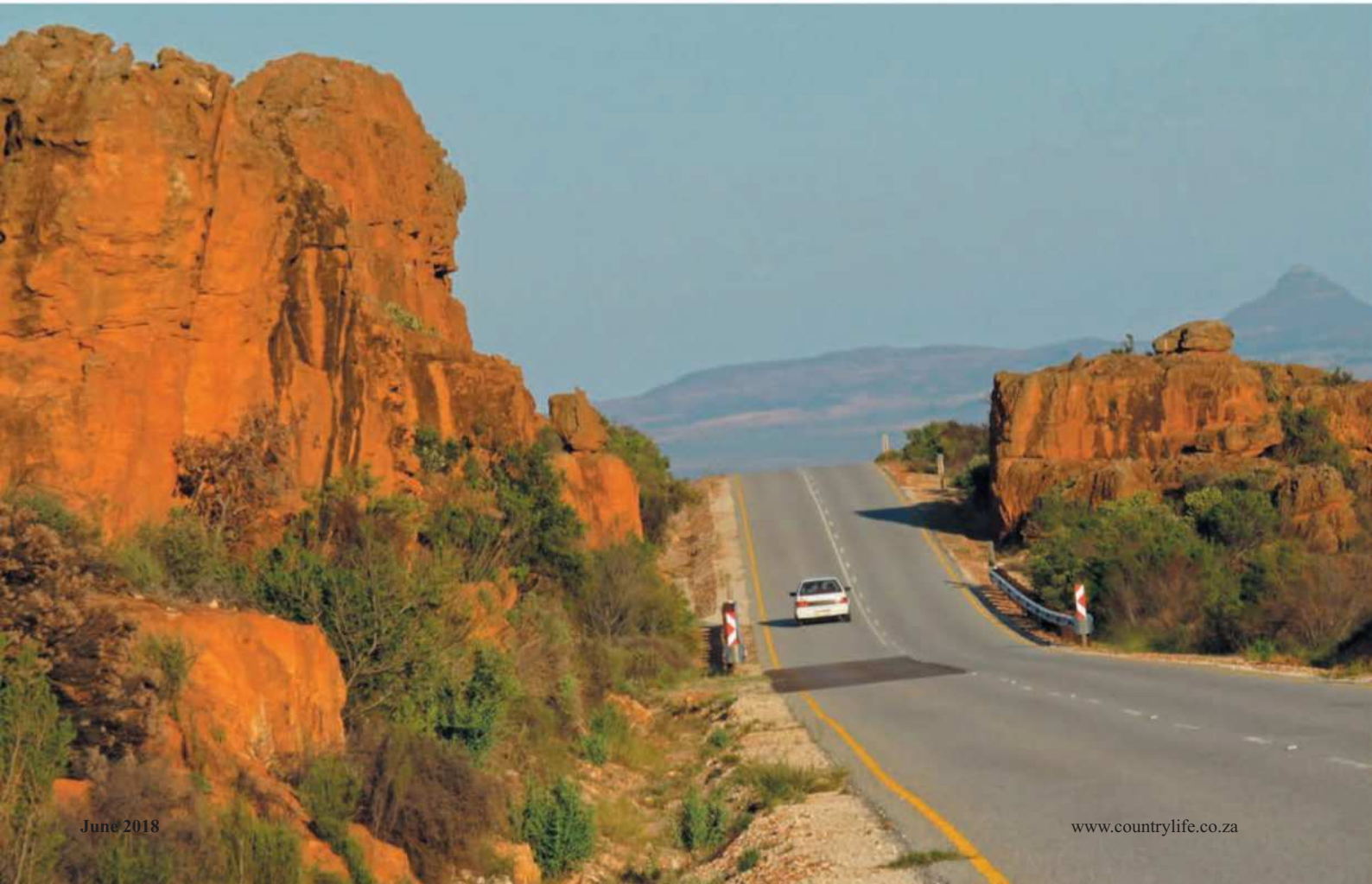
WORDS AND PICTURES RON SWILLING

High above Clanwilliam, the craggy Cederberg mountains reign supreme. It is here among the sandstone rocks that biomes meet, Cape leopards prowl and ancient paintings adorn rock overhangs, revealing a time when elephants still roamed the Cape and hunter-gatherers drank from the mountain streams.

The Pakhuis Pass, said to be named because of the rocks packed on top of each other, as you would find goods in a *pakhuis* (packing shed), links Clanwilliam to the Calvinia farming region. Thomas Bain, responsible for building many of the Cape's mountain passes (as was his father Andrew Geddes Bain), started work on the pass in 1874, completing it in 1877. It was widened and reworked in the 1960s, and gradually tarred over the years, transforming the journey into an easy drive.

For the first 21 kilometres, the pass snakes through the rugged rock, and rises to 905 metres above sea level, before descending into the valley of a more agricultural area known as Agter-Pakhuis. The entire tarred stretch from Clanwilliam to a grave at the far end, dubbed the Englishman's Grave, is a 41-kilometre Pakhuis feast.

From here on, corrugated gravel roads continue to Calvinia and veer off to the Bidouw Valley and the small hamlet of Wuppertal, an area characterised by weathered rock formations that resemble



rocky forts, larger-than-life faces and mythological creatures.

"When I drive into Clanwilliam, I feel like I'm landing." Becky Cooper puts my sentiments into words as she describes driving down to town from the heights of the pass. We sit outside at Alpha Excelsior Guest Farm. A few friendly Labradors and Border Collies mill around Becky's toddler, Emily, and the last boulderers of the season sip cappuccinos on the stoep. Next to us runs a stream, around us are farmlands and in the distance loom the mountains.

Becky and her husband James followed in the footsteps of her parents, Lizzy and Connie du Toit, and left their careers in Cape Town to move to the guest farm. Alpha Excelsior started as a rooibos, grape and olive farm, with a cottage for guest accommodation. But that was in 2003 and things were about to change dramatically in the sleepy platteland community.

In 2004, Klem Loskot, an Austrian climber, stayed with friends in the Coopers' cottage rather than camp outdoors when one of the party fell sick. This gave Klem the chance to explore the surroundings, and discover its vast bouldering potential. The section on the top of the pass had already been explored in 1996 by American climber Tod Skinner, who came to rope climb, and noticed the large concentration of rock with its many technical holds.

As the sport grew, the farms provided more accommodation and camping, but fast

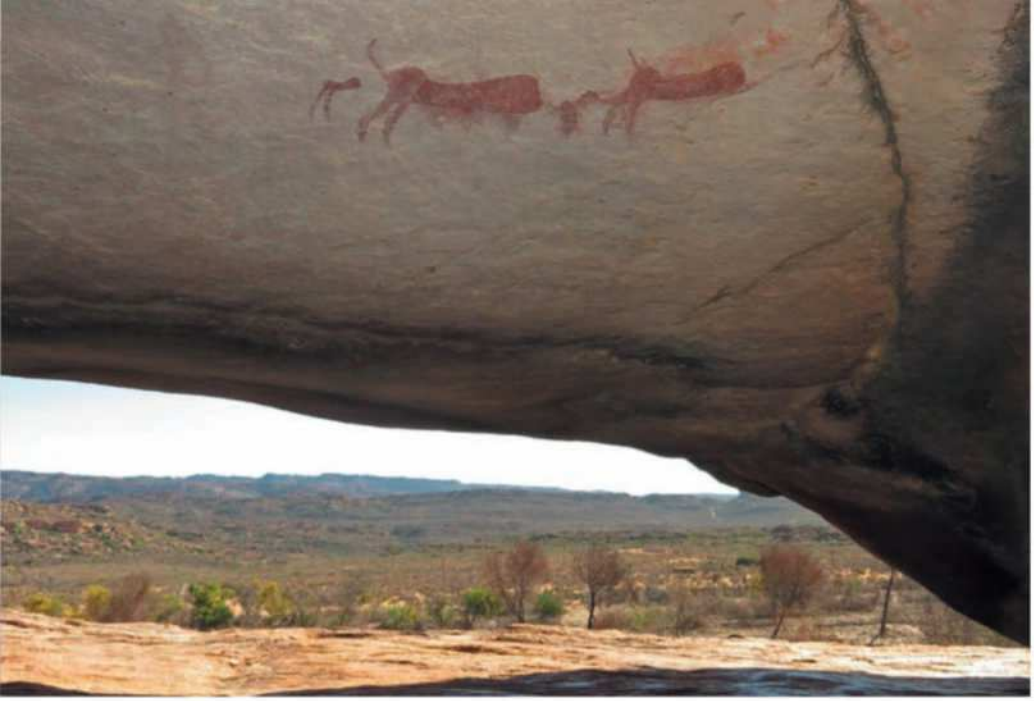
OPPOSITE: Red sandstone rock formations characterise the Pakhuis Pass. ABOVE: The combination of rugged rock and wilderness makes the Pakhuis and beyond a favourite haunt for nature lovers – and boulderers. RIGHT: James and Becky Cooper, with baby Emily, outside the Hen House at Alpha Excelsior. BELOW: In the late afternoon, the sandstone rock takes on a rich red hue as if on fire. (Photos Rebecca Emma Cooper)

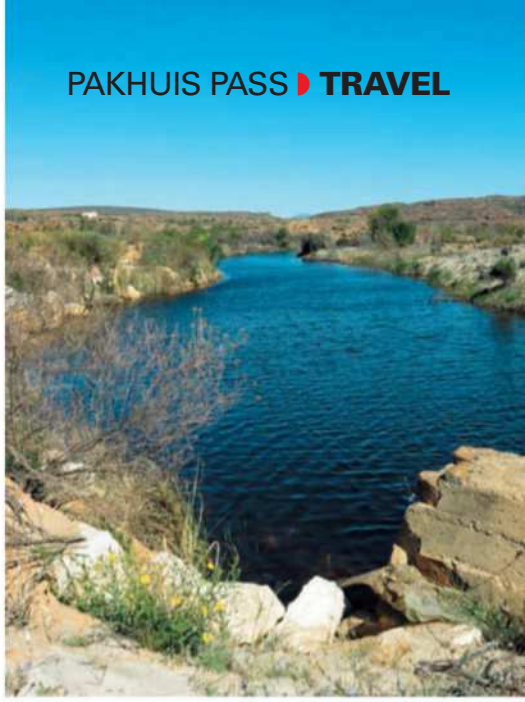
ABOVE LEFT: An old cart with a wine-barrel and horseshoe marks the entrance to Alpha Excelsior. ABOVE: For annual Pakhuis boulderers Wieneke Gehem and Frank Bogerman, the visit is not just about climbing, but the holiday and being in nature. LEFT: Alpha Excelsior's vineyards border their farmhouse accommodation. BELOW LEFT: A short walk to a waterfall or dam for a swim is a refreshing treat on a warm Cederberg day.

forward to more than a decade and the Pakhuis (or Rocklands, as it's known to boulderers) is now a bouldering mecca that attracts many international visitors from May to the end of September, during the coolest months of the year. The rugged landscape provides relatively stable rock with ample finger- and footholds for this type of climbing, which involves working out solutions to negotiate the rock formations without ropes – taking into account body weight and reach – with patience, wit, skill, and a good deal of upper-body and finger strength.

To date there are more than 2 000 boulder 'problems' to solve here on top of the world, but it's much more than that. It's also about the Pakhuis mojo. Regular annual visitors, Wieneke Gehem and Frank Bogerman from Holland, put it into perspective, "We come for climbing, but being out in nature here is a big part of it."

At Alpha Excelsior, James Cooper, who calls himself 'juice manager' perfects the range of Rugged Rocks wines, and bottles the olives grown on the farm. Coming from a conservation background, he is quite at home in this pocket of the Cape with its diverse plant life and abundant birds and





TOP LEFT: The five-kilometre Sevilla Trail starts at Traveller's Rest and is a 'must-do' for fine rock-art viewing. TOP RIGHT: The Brandewynrivier at Traveller's Rest, where many a traveller once took a breather before proceeding into the hinterland with their ox wagons. ABOVE: "It's the Lord's world here." Joan and Jack Penberthy from Klein Kliphuis have turned their property into a small nature reserve. RIGHT: There are many walks in the Cederberg, from gentle ambles to strenuous trails.

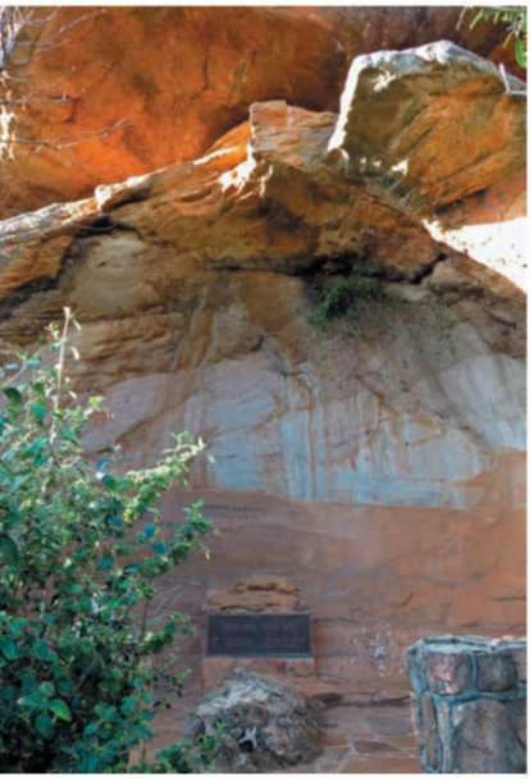
insects. "The wilderness area still has a wild, wild feeling," he says. "The San lived here in harmony with nature. History is there to see on the rocks. It gives you a sense of spirituality and heritage."

This is echoed throughout the region. Joan and Jack Penberthy from Klein Kliphuis have lived here for 46 years, turning their property into a small nature reserve. "It's the Lord's world here," Joan tells me in their small tea garden. "It's natural and we want to try to keep it that way. That's what draws people here."

Klein Kliphuis was one of the first farms in the area to grow rooibos commercially. It was a day's travel from Clanwilliam by ox wagon on the old road, a portion of which is now their driveway, and the Penberthys still find the names of early pioneers scrawled on cave walls from times when they outspanned on top of the pass.

Home to a rich floral kingdom, at the spot where three biomes (Fynbos, Succulent Karoo and Nama Karoo) meet, the Pakhuis expanse is a treasure-house of medicinal plants. Tracy du Plessis discovered this ancient world of knowledge and healing when she moved from the city to farm here with her husband JP, and set up their glamping accommodation in the rocky surrounds. Tracy started delving into the natural pharmacy on their doorstep, and this led to her developing a natural fynbos range called Storytellers Fynbos Apothecary. "If you step out and walk for five minutes you'll see so many medicinal plants around you."

While local plant knowledge is passed down through generations, history leaves its mark in an entirely different way. On the lofty crown of the Pakhuis Pass is the resting place of C Louis Leipoldt, doctor and well-known Afrikaans poet and writer, and



ABOVE: C Louis Leipoldt's grave, set in a rock shelter, looks onto the three peaks he named Faith, Hope and Charity. RIGHT: Haffie Strauss and her daughter Charité van Rijswijk, from Traveller's Rest, both grew up in the Cederberg mountains and can't imagine living in town. BELOW: The Englishman's Grave is the last landmark on the tarred R364 before the road becomes gravel. BELOW RIGHT: During the flower season you may be fortunate to come across a field in bloom.

the Englishman's Grave lies at the far end of the tarred stretch, where British officer Lieutenant Graham Vinicombe Winchester Clowes was killed in an engagement with the Boers in 1901 (see our feature on page 42).

Before this final landmark, a favourite stop for a break is Traveller's Rest farmstall and restaurant, from where the Sevilla Trail is a short two-hour stroll to nine sites of San paintings. Aptly named, Traveller's Rest was a place for travellers to rest on the banks of the Brandewynrivier on their way into the hinterland.

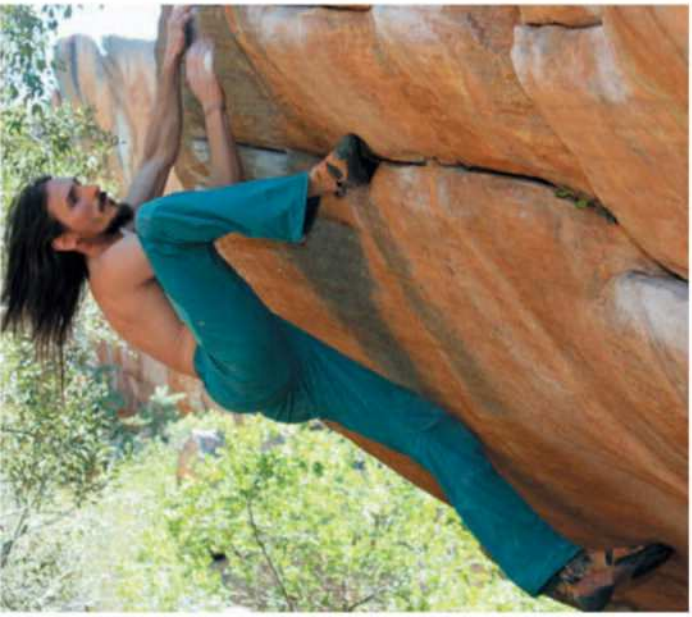
Owners Charité van Rijswijk and her mom, Haffie Strauss, join me on the veranda of the laid-back restaurant, and we watch visitors try out their balance on a highline set up on the lawn. Others return hot and sweaty from the rock art trail, crossing the river on their way back to the restaurant.

Haffie is sure that the river was named after her grandfather, who made brandy on the neighbouring farm, and is thought to have imbibed most of it himself. Haffie went to a farm school until grade six, when she followed the family tradition and continued her schooling in Cape Town.

Afterwards she returned to the farm and married the boy next door, and moved to the adjacent farm where potatoes, sweetcorn, lemons, onions, wheat, and granadillas were grown. "I moved all of five kilometres," she says with a laugh. Today, they grow rooibos, have small herds of sheep and cattle, and more than 30 rustic guest cottages, dotted about the land.

Their many years in the area haven't dulled their appreciation of the landscape.

www.countrylife.co.za



ABOVE LEFT: A playground and hub for bouldering, Rocklands attracts boulderers from around the globe. (Photo JP du Plessis) ABOVE RIGHT: At Alpha Excelsior's Donkey Camp, several donkeys look for tasty treats. BELOW: The view from the top of the Pakhuis Pass, looking down into the valley of the more agricultural Agter-Pakhuis.

"I'm 74 years old," Haffie tells me, "and every time I travel this pass, it's beautiful. It's either a different season or a different time of day. The rocks always seem alive."

Haffie relates the story of the esteemed Dr Nortier, her grandfather on her mother's side of the family. Nortier was instrumental in kickstarting the rooibos industry by discovering the trick to germinating the seeds, which enabled the herbal tea to be grown commercially.

An avid nature lover, he would drive up the gravel road from the town in the evenings. When he reached the top of the pass, he would turn the car to face Clanwilliam and sit and watch the sunset. The children weren't allowed to say a word.

Haffie has many tales from the time before the road was tarred – and ghost stories. "People often spoke about Ou Poort [the rock gully before Traveller's Rest]. They said you couldn't travel through it on horse cart at night. The horses would refuse to enter the poort and the horse carts often had to turn back. But if you did manage to proceed, a woman in a long white gown would climb aboard, only to disappear when you were out of the kloof."

I return to my colourful caravan at Alpha Excelsior in the late afternoon, as the rocks take on their deep-red hue. Time to pour a glass of Rugged Rocks Red, sit back and watch the light a while longer. Soon it is time for a fire, and time to savour feeling so close to the sky I could pluck out a star. Or so it seems. It's that Pakhuis mojo. ■

Map reference F2 see inside back cover

Where to Stay

Alpha Excelsior has private cottages, a 200-year-old farmhouse, and well-equipped caravans 027 482 2700, 060 433 2559 www.alphaexcelsior.co.za

Klein Kliphuis offers off-the-grid accommodation and camping 027 482 2564

Traveller's Rest has rustic farm cottages 027 482 1824, www.travellersrest.co.za

Storytellers for glamping among the rocks 027 470 0057, 082 862 7372 www.thestorytellers.co.za

Distances from Clanwilliam

Klein Kliphuis 11km
Louis Leipoldt's grave 17km
Alpha Excelsior 25km
Traveller's Rest 35km

The Englishman's Grave

'Brave and True' reads his epitaph, in a quiet spot at the top of the Cederberg's Pakhuis Pass that marks his final resting place. PAUL MORRIS stops to find out more

The Englishman's Grave stands on high ground next to the quiet Pakhuis Pass. Enclosed by a wrought-iron fence and marked by a military headstone, it overlooks the rocky, khaki-clad Cederberg Mountains a couple of hours' drive north of Cape Town.

Somewhere below the road are the trenches dug by British soldiers in the gravelly mountainside during the Second Anglo-Boer War. I've heard that time and weather have all but erased them. But I can't look for them today because I am travelling with dogs and they are not allowed on that land. Anyway, there is little there now but ghosts and the breeze. And I've already found other defensive positions at the southern end of the range.

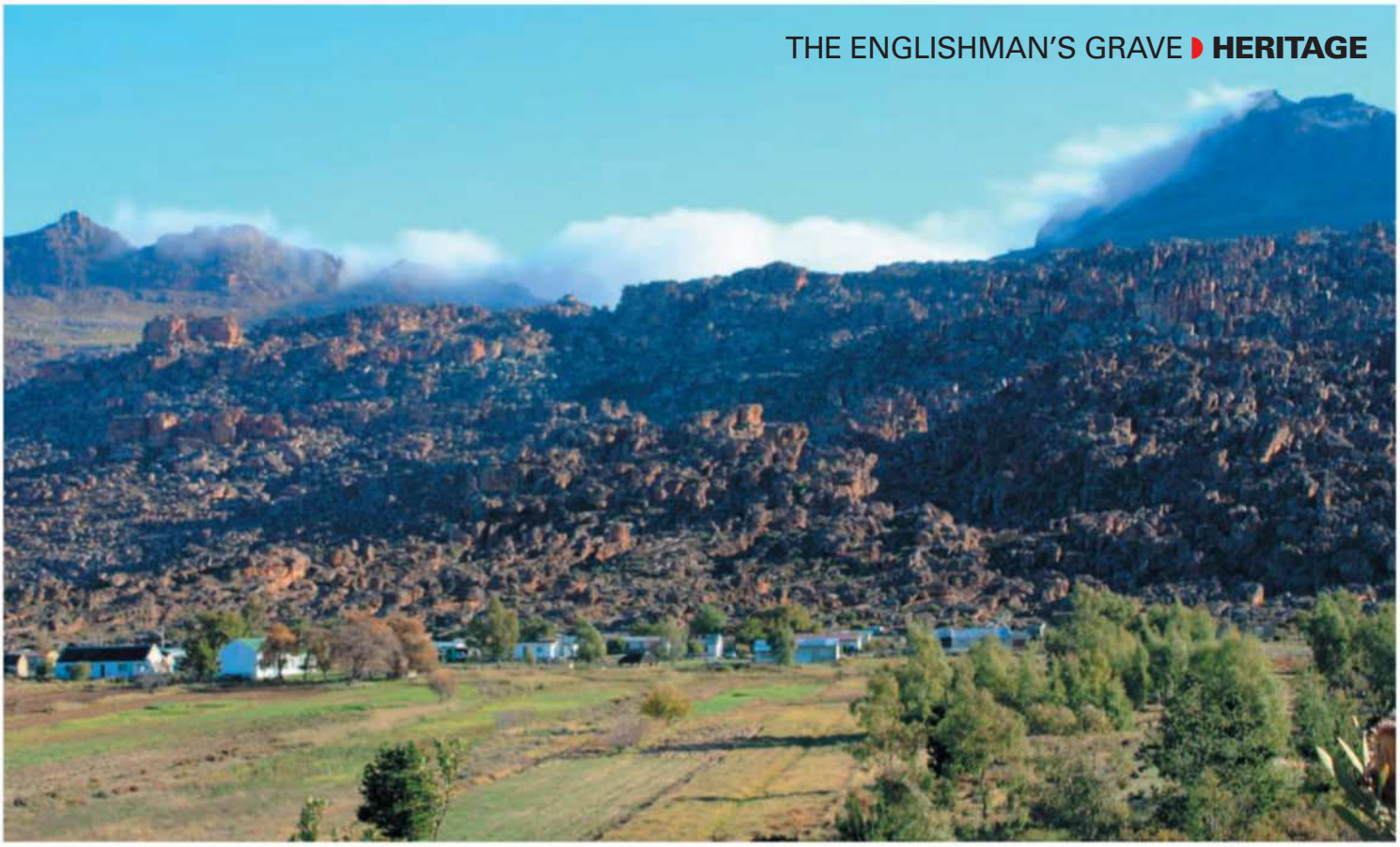
My visit is in the winter and the light is soft and pleasant. The Englishman who lies in the grave nearby died in the summer and would have known the dry, weighty Cederberg heat sucking the moisture from his body. He'd have known the hard light turning everything to monochrome.

His name was Lieutenant Graham Vinicombe Winchester Clowes of the 1st Battalion Gordon Highlanders. His unit was here to stop Boer guerrillas from infiltrating the Cape Colony. He was killed in a skirmish on 30 January 1901.

I have driven from Cape Town through the pretty, fruit-growing valley that surrounds the little town of Ceres. For several hours I made the journey along the 4x4 route, through the isolated hamlet of Eselbank and on to the Moravian mission village of Wuppertal with its pretty white church. The 4x4 route is a little misleading as I meet a crowded, rusting Corolla crawling along in the other direction. I wonder how much of its undercarriage has been left behind on the rocky track.

It's a slow, rewarding journey through some of the remote parts of the range, where dramatic red sandstone formations are wind-carved from the sediment of what was once a warm shallow sea. The landscape wouldn't have looked much different when Lieutenant Clowes was patrolling the range on horseback at the turn of the previous century.

On my way to the Englishman's Grave, I stop at Mount Ceder resort in the southern part of the range. I'd been told that there are more British trenches near here and I want to find them. I'd searched for them unsuccessfully on a previous expedition, expecting them to be on the river bank



OPPOSITE: The commanding view of the rocky Cederberg confronting the Ist Battalion Gordon Highlanders, tasked with stopping Boer guerrillas from infiltrating the Cape Colony. ABOVE: The hamlet of Eselbank lies deep in the Cederberg and is only accessible by 4x4 (or battered Corolla, apparently). RIGHT: The story goes that Clowes was killed further down the mountainside and that his mother had his body reburied at the current grave site. BELOW RIGHT: A story smudged by time. The epitaph on Lieutenant Clowes' headstone is difficult to read. Just as the details of his story are difficult to discover.

protecting the ford. They weren't there.

This time a helpful staff member from the resort directs me back to a spot along the road with a commanding view of the valley, and there I find what appears to be the remains of the British defences. A pile of rocks, once organised, now a jumbled crescent from the past. It's not surprising that the little fortification consisted of a rock wall and not a trench. The ground here is stony and hard, an infantry soldier's dread.

This is an obvious defensive position, situated above the road as it crests a saddle. It was built just below the ridge so that the soldiers manning it would not be silhouetted against the sky. I imagine them here, bored and homesick and drinking warm water from sun-heated canteens. It was then, and is still, an out of the way part of the country.

One of the things about war is that the stories are often lost or smudged by time. And so it is with the Englishman buried on the Pakhuis Pass. There are variations on his tale. The one I find most likely is that Clowes' patrol crossed paths with Boer scouts. A brief skirmish ensued and the young lieutenant lay dead on the stony mountainside. Simple, brutal and tragic.

The Cederberg wasn't a major theatre during the war. General Jan Smuts came into the area with a commando in a largely unsuccessful attempt to recruit Cape Boers but there were no major battles here. According to the stories, Clowes had previously fought at the big battle of Magersfontein in 1899. The British force had been deployed to relieve the siege of Kimberley. Due to poor British reconnaissance and clever Boer tactics they suffered a defeat that stunned the Empire.

ABOVE: Soft winter light in the Cederberg. But Lieutenant Clowes would have known the oppressive, dry heat of summer. BELOW LEFT: The true costs of war play out in the lives of many individuals, some who live and some who die. The young lieutenant was remembered by his mother, whose pilgrimage of remembrance brought her into the Cederberg. BOTTOM LEFT: The soldiers guarding the road had a commanding view of the valley from their defensive positions. BELOW: The jumbled crescent of rocks believed to be British defensive positions from the Anglo-Boer War.

It might have come as some respite for the young lieutenant to find himself posted to this backwater of the war. Although there is no telling whether it will be a significant battle or an insignificant skirmish that will do for you in the end.

Lieutenant Clowes' story doesn't end with his death. The story goes that his mother, so overcome with grief, travelled to the Cape Colony to visit his grave. It is told that she had his body moved from where he was buried after the skirmish, to its current site higher up the mountainside. And that she returned every year on the anniversary of his death.

This would have been quite an achievement. First a long voyage from England, then an arduous journey by wagon from Cape Town that would have taken several days. The long, winding Pakhuis Pass through the Cederberg, now a good tar road, would have been little more than a wagon track. Even one visit would have been an impressive undertaking by someone more familiar with the lanes of England. Clowes was, after all, from Hitchin in the gentle landscape of Hertfordshire.

That evening, I sit and reflect by my campfire with the dogs sleeping at my feet. In the great sweep of history, wars are reduced to a series of dates and famous battles and names of generals. Occasionally one is reminded that the true costs of war play out in the lives of many individuals. Some who live and some who die, forgotten by history but remembered by the families who survive them.

In the case of the young lieutenant who lies buried here, his mother remembered him by travelling to this arid place to visit his grave and to mourn his death, family paying the painful price of keeping an empire.

Today I see flowers on Lieutenant Clowes' grave. Someone still remembers him more than a century later. ■

Map reference F2 see inside back cover

WHAT TO EXPECT AT THIS YEAR'S CONFERENCE

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Under the Skin

They're all streaming to the platteland these days – computer geeks, baristas, social media mavens, and now a tattoo artist with a Taekwondo habit he just can't kick

WORDS AND PICTURES CHRIS MARAIS WWW.KAROOSPACE.CO.ZA

Where do you find tattoo artists? Normally they would hang out in strange inner-city basement dens, down dodgy streets where old soldiers, young sailors, truckers and bikers like to drink. Right next to bars where it's easy to have a skinful (so to speak) and say, what the hell, let's go get tatted. Badass places.

You don't expect a young man with a wife, three daughters, one pitbull called Kobe, and two cuddly corn snakes to be plying his trade as an up-and-coming tattooist in a Karoo town like Cradock. In this part of the world, tattoos usually happen to prize sheep or cattle, which have numbers branded on their ears.

But here is Brendon Fletcher (32) and his young family, living in a classic Karoo *dorpshuis* with a stoep and Victorian bullnose roof, opposite the Oasis Café with its standard platteland fast food – vetkoek and mince, cheese grillers, monkey gland burgers, boerie pizza, Dagwoods and slap chips. The vetkoek and mince, by the way, is yum.

He laughs easily and, once you get used to his gauged (stretched) earlobes, tattooed neck, arms, back and stomach, you realise this is no backyard inker. He's the real deal, having served an apprenticeship with one of the best in the country – Cecil Lindgren of Bayview in Port Elizabeth.

Brendon was first tattooed at age 16 (with permission from his parents) when his passion for the ancient Korean martial art of Taekwondo was reaching a peak. The Korean letters for the word are etched on his forearm. His next was a tattoo of a raven, (Brendon means 'little raven' in Irish Gaelic) done on his back between the shoulder blades. "But it looks more like a swallow if you ask me," he says with a grin.

After he was unbeaten in Taekwondo matches for three years, he had 'Nemesis' tattooed in Gothic script down his other forearm. Brendon then lived and worked in Cape Town as a graphic artist, spending some time as the project manager for a signage company. But the corporate environment depressed him. "Eventually I found a canvas I really love – skin."

He served a three-year apprenticeship

BELOW: The class begins with the classic Taekwondo Oath. RIGHT: Brendon preps for the first stages of a new tattoo session.

in Port Elizabeth under Cecil. An apprentice spends most of his or her time getting artwork and stencils right, and then learns how to tattoo his or her skin. Which is why so many of the best tattooists carry their own rookie mistakes etched on their bodies. "You can also get something called synthetic skin to practise on. But it's not really the same. We also work on pigskin from the butcher. But again, not the same."

And what do tattoo artists get up to when they're bored? They play noughts and crosses on each other's skin with tattoo machines and ink. There's one of those on the inside of one of Brendon's arms. Along with a spiderweb, and the Serenity Prayer, a koi fish, an angel and a few other random bits and pieces.

Their arrival in Cradock from Port Elizabeth in October 2016 caused a ripple of disbelief in the town. No one else around here sported such an array of tattoos or, for that matter, a brace of stretched earlobes. "In the city, someone with tats like me is kind of normal. You wouldn't look twice. Here I was the only one. But now they know me. I'm accepted. All kinds of people come for tattoos and piercings."

ABOVE: Cradock's resident tattoo artist, Brendon Fletcher, in the veld outside the little Eastern Cape Karoo town.
RIGHT: Into the skin, as Brendon works on a client's tattoo design.

Now that word is getting out that a first-class tattoo artist has opened his doors in Cradock, coastal urbanites are making their way inland to be inked.

On the morning of our interview, his first client has also arrived. She's a Port Elizabeth woman who's just signed her divorce papers, is losing some serious weight, and is marking her rite of passage with a third tattoo in nearly as many weeks.

As Brendon begins to work on her, I nose about his studio. In a glass-fronted cabinet are arranged a rock, a log, a pink bowl full of water, an upside-down ice-cream container, and what looks like an electric blanket for Tinkerbell. It's actually a heating pad.

During a break in proceedings, Brendon offers to show me the inhabitants of the mystery case. Off comes the lid. He opens up the heating pad and there are two intertwined

LEFT: The Redemption Ink repair job that Brendon performed some time ago on Gideon van Biljon's old tattoo. RIGHT: Gideon isn't mad about the first pangs of tattoo pain, but he's quite fond of the "burning feeling" that follows. BELOW: 'Life is a Journey' – not bad words to have tattooed forever on your arm.

serpents. One is an orange intricately patterned Aztec corn snake called Rat-a-Tatt. The other, also a corn snake, has red eyes, pale skin and goes by the name Pandora. They are not really supposed to be sociable, but these two seem quite chummy. Every week, they are fed a baby mouse each. "You wouldn't think so, but they're amazingly rewarding pets to have."

Gideon van Biljon from Water Affairs pops in to pay his Taekwondo fees and to make an appointment for his next tattoo. Brendon has already done a fair amount of work on him, repairing the damage caused by an amateur who etched a moon and a few stars on his arm. Now they're integrated into a much more eye-pleasing pattern.

"I do a lot of cover-ups. People have the names of their boyfriend or girlfriend or whatever tattooed on them and it's seriously the kiss of death. I can't tell you how often I hear that they've broken up three or four months after the tattoo." Another way of removing tattoos is with lasers, but it's a long and expensive road. The name of Brendon's business is Redemption Ink because, as he says, "I redeem artists' work."

The holes in his ears are not just for decorative purposes. They indicate seniority in the tattoo world. The bigger the 'gauge' or the larger the earlobe is stretched, the longer you've been in the game. It takes a while. His mentor Cecil has earlobes the size of a traditional Zulu man's.

What do Karoo people want etched on their skin? "I must have done a million infinity symbols. And that Faith, Hope and Love symbol on the wrist or on the shoulder, just next to the collarbone. And dream catchers, lots of those. Also children's names. Guys tend to go for those full-sleeve tribal tattoos that sportsmen have made popular. I'm not sure what Maori tattoos have to do with South Africa, but that's what people want at the moment.

"I suppose what I love about being a tattooist is creating a piece of art on someone's skin. You know it's going to be forever, and that adrenalin rush. For both of you I guess. You can't really get rid of it. It is for life."

The pain is a factor that no one can quite explain, but it hooks people in. "It feels like a hot scratch. That's about the best way I can describe it," says Brendon. "You can't have a tattoo session that lasts much longer than three hours because your adrenalin levels drop and then it can get painful."

A few days later, Gideon comes round for his forearm tattoo. He's been thinking about it, and he wants the words 'Life is a Journey' there. Brendon shows him the option of various scripts, he decides on one and Brendon shaves the arm hair. "I don't like the pain while it's happening, but I really like that burning feeling for a few days afterwards. That's my favourite part," says Gideon. He is super chuffed with the result.

Everyone has to sign an indemnity form, and Brendon will not tattoo a drunk or a minor. He'll only do piercings on youngsters if they present signed permission notes from parents or legal guardians.

We see him a day later at Cradock

What do Karoo people want etched on their skin? "I must have done a million infinity symbols on the wrist or on the shoulder

Preparatory School, where he is teaching Taekwondo to a squad of locals, from five-year-olds all the way up to 29ers, three times a week. Outside the hall, they go through the moves after reciting the Taekwondo Oath, which sounds like something the Knights of the Round Table might have memorised, back in the days of dragons and damsels in distress. Not for nothing are Brendon's Taekwondo club members called Mystic Wolves.

"I will observe the tenets of Taekwondo. I will respect instructors and seniors. I will never misuse Taekwondo. I will be a champion of freedom and justice. I will help to build a more peaceful world." ■

Map reference F5 see inside back cover

Brendon Fletcher, Redemption Ink
071 741 0674, bsfletcher@msn.com
www.facebook.com/riottattoos

ABOVE: Brendon Fletcher and his beloved corn snakes, Rat-a-Tatt and Pandora. TOP RIGHT: Taekwondo classes might be commonplace in a city, but in a small Karoo town they are still super-exotic. RIGHT: Brendon Fletcher and his wife Taryn with (from left) new-born Arianna Grace, Holly-Rose (6), Thea-Jane (4) and the ever-alert but super-gentle Kobe the pitbull terrier.

Fynbos Fine-tuned

In the Garden Route village of Klein Brak, a passion for nature and hiking is turned into a budding business

WORDS AND PICTURES MARION WHITEHEAD

Matthew Thorpe jokes that he's the Bos, and his wife Sharné is the Fyn part of their business.

For Matthew and Sharné Thorpe, the elements for their new venture fell into place over a number of years, before they leaped into a very steep learning curve. Neither had experience of running their own business, nor of the proudly South African home-decor and soft-furnishings fields they had launched themselves into.

The pair met in Sharné's home town of East London, where Matt was a commercial lawyer in the corporate field, and found they shared a love of nature, both having grown up in the countryside. On hikes together he noticed she had a keen eye and took great pictures with her cellphone, so he gave her a small Nikon camera. Sharné's creativity blossomed and, after the couple moved to Cape Town, trips to the Cederberg and up the West Coast in flower season produced more beautiful images.

"I've always felt more myself when I'm in nature, and I've always wanted to protect those who can't speak for themselves," says Sharné, a Pilates instructor with a background in teaching life skills to youth groups.

Entranced by the flowers and the different shapes and forms in the fynbos, she started exploring in earnest how her photos could become a business, after Matt tired of corporate life and the couple moved to his family's holiday house at Klein Brak, outside Mossel Bay on the Garden Route, three years ago.

Sharné hatched the idea of printing her photos onto fabric, and the idea for their Fyn & Bos brand came from Matt. "We wanted to achieve a playful yin and yang tension between elegant and wild. Something eclectic, untamed, humourous and even a little mad. It's a dichotomy that exists in all of us and is in a continual state of flux. "I'm the Bos and she's the Fyn part," he jokes. Sharné retorts with a laugh, "But when we argue that's sometimes switched around."

They started their home-decor range with cushions because they thought they would be

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The joy of a Namaqualand spring bounces into the living room with this cushion from Fyn & Bos. ● *Blombos* (metalasia) lights up the hills in the Goukamma Nature Reserve on the Garden Route. ● Sharné's creativity has blossomed since she was given a camera and it has become the basis of the couple's business. ● Sharné uses insects in her compositions, such as this bee on an *Aloe ferox* spike. (Photo Sharné Thorpe) ● Matthew and Sharné Thorpe keep a close eye on their local conservancy in Klein Brak.

easiest to print digitally. But when the first one came back, it was an odd-shaped, limp thing. "First Sharné laughed – and then she cried," recalls Matthew.

It was an expensive mistake, but they rapidly learned ow to size and deep-etch images, the value of negative space and making correct allowances for seams – and about the technology of modern printing on natural and synthetic fabrics.

"The creative side is very rewarding," says Matt, who can now toss off technical terminology with ease. His legal training has proved very useful and he still does consultancy work. "I knew intellectual property

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: There's more to fynbos than the king protea: *Protea obtusifolia* blooms in the Overberg. ● Burnt protea bush landscape near Silvermine. ● The varied textures of local plants offer designers plenty of inspiration. ● The Klein Plaas Dam hike leads through a leucadendron landscape. ● Sharné's take on the king protea for a wallpaper design is a soft, feminine view of the large spiky flower that is our national emblem.

law and trademarks before, but not in this kind of detail."

While their cushions celebrating fynbos remain their best-seller, their range has expanded to wallpapers and curtains printed with their distinctive fynbos images, and bespoke furniture, which turned heads at the recent Homemakers Expo in Cape Town.

"South Africa has so much going for it. We should be doing more with our resources," enthuses Matt, strategic director for the enterprise. "Sixty per cent of fynbos is endemic which makes it very special. Interior design should also play a role in promoting this country on the global stage."

Early botanical travellers visiting this country waxed lyrical about our botanical treasures in the world's most diverse plant kingdom, but today, when people think of fynbos, they often picture only our iconic national emblem.

"Fynbos is 9 000 species strong, and we're trying to show that it's much more than just the king protea. We did a hike from Robinson Pass outside Mossel Bay on our anniversary and found *Protea coronata*, the green protea, which now features on some of our cushions. And what about Darling's yellow *kelkiewyn* (*Gheissorhiza darlingensis*)? There are so many aloes

ABOVE: This beautiful two-tone bespoke couch by Fyn & Bos is handcrafted by a master carpenter in George. RIGHT: Experienced seamstresses Leonie Stone and Eunice Danster working on one of Fyn & Bos' distinctive cushion covers. (Photo Sharné Thorpe) BELOW: If you think the king protea is all the fynbos has to offer, check out these lovely cushions featuring the *Protea neriifolia*. BELOW RIGHT: Sisters Des Dalton (left) and Jackie Kritzinger of the Logo Shop in Mossel Bay where Sheila Matiwane (centre) machine embroiders the Fyn & Bos logo onto fabric. (Photo Sharné Thorpe) BOTTOM RIGHT: Matthew and Sharné Thorpe are active members of the Midbrak Conservancy and help maintain the trails in it.

too – so much is untapped and we're not showcasing it enough," points out Matt.

When taking photos, Sharné the creative director doesn't shoo the goggas off the gorgeous blooms. "I took this picture of a *rooistompie* (mimetes) with an ant on it and enlarged the ant when processing the image. It's a fun element – we don't take ourselves too seriously," says Sharné.

She has an eye for different shapes and forms, not just the 'pretty' stuff. One design features her photo of dead aloe leaves in shades of neutral beige to dusky burgundy, another is a close-up of the centre of the husk of a burnt protea, where the fibonacci spiral that is part of nature's design dominates.

They play with colours and pattern variations, printing mainly on natural fabrics such as hemp canvas and cotton twill, but their curtains contain some polyester to help resist the sun.

Their fabric is printed on big digital presses in Cape Town, but they make a point of supporting other Garden Route businesses. "Our logos that Sharné designed are embroidered and screenprinted at the Logo Studio in Mossel Bay and we use a carpentry business in George to make the two-tone couches and ottomans," says Matt. "Our seamstress lives down the road in Klein Brak and has a shop in Mossel Bay."

Seamstress Leonie Stone has been in the decor industry for 18 years. She and hubby Ferdie swopped Pretoria for "a calmer life" three years ago and she greatly admires

Sharné's designs. "They are very different and are really quite special – each one is what she has seen and photographed."

Matt and Sharné dream of expanding their business and their range. "I want to grow it into a full-circle business where people can learn new skills and improve their lives," says Sharné. The couple glory in the surrounding fynbos of the Garden Route and are actively working to protect the local conservancy sandwiched between Klein Brak and Tergniet.

"The future of this country is in nature conservation," believes Matthew. "It can generate an income for the people and preserve the creatures living here." ■

Map reference G4 see inside back cover

Fyn & Bos 079 475 2378, www.fynandbos.co.za

Welcome to Book Central

If you thought Hermanus was just for whales, here's one for the books

WORDS AND PICTURES SUE ADAMS

HEMINGWAYS

"I used to steal books from the church library when I was little," says Noel Hunt in his rambling book shop that's filled to the brim with collectable and second-hand books. "When I got caught by my dad and the Reverend, I had about 150 books in my cupboard."

Noel was trained as an architectural designer, but the core of his life has been books. "He introduced me to books," says his wife Beth, who describes herself as a "collectable" kind of person. "I never read before I met him but now we're both addicts."

The shop originally sold bric-a-brac but, in 1999 (the 100th anniversary of Ernest Hemingway's birth and hence the name), it evolved into a book shop.

Set in an old house a short walk from the cliff path, Hemmingways has an enticing red shop front of painted books. Inside, rambling rooms are filled with books that jostle for space with crockery, sculptures and bric-a-brac. Beth constantly feeds her creative streak by rearranging the displays, while Noel is the bibliophile and fount of knowledge if you're looking for something specific.

"The best part of the shop is the people we meet," says Beth. "Knowing that we all love books gives us the connectivity." With treasures and eye-catching displays in every nook, this is a bookshop you will not leave easily.

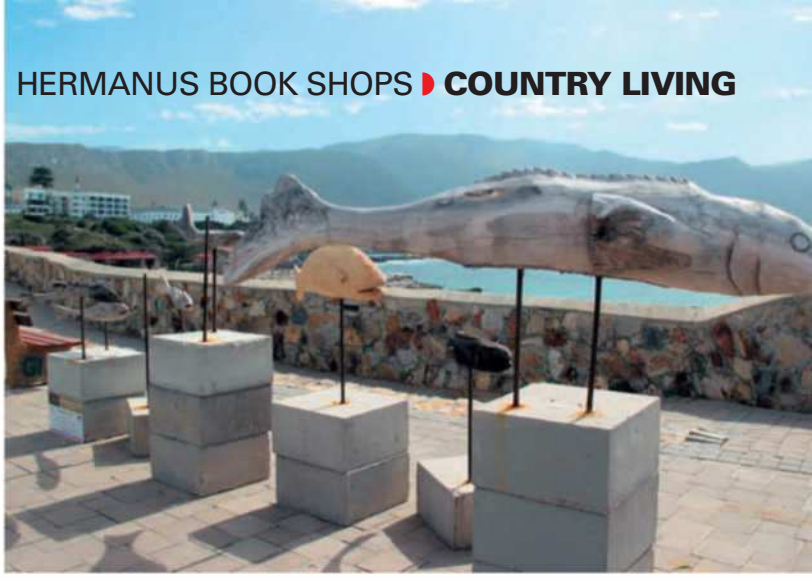
4 Harbour Road, 028 312 2739

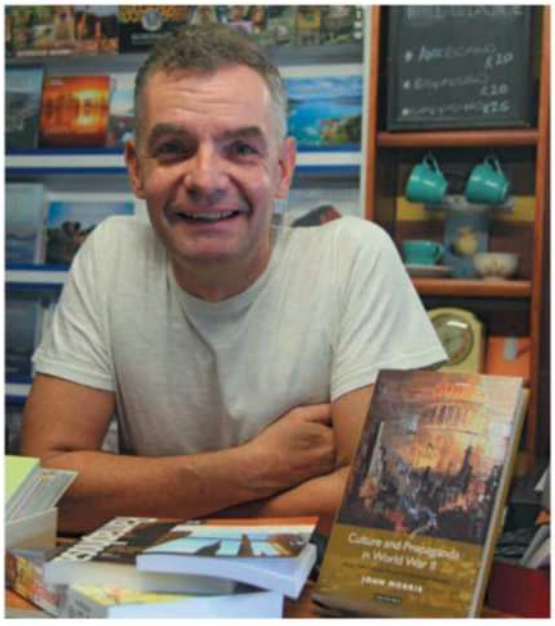
TIP Beth has written a book on Hermanus that's on sale here (*Hermanus – Whales, Wine, Fynbos, Art*). The shop stays open into the evening on the first Friday of the month for the Friday Art Walk.

THE BOOK COTTAGE

Here's a book shop with the old-world feel of a British book store, and it's not surprising that owner John Morris hails from the UK. "I worked in the book-selling world in London at the London School of Economics, and then in the library at the House of Lords," he says.

He was never a reader but, when a friend gave him a list of 20 classics, he went on a mission to read them. This ignited a passion and he eventually became





OPPOSITE: Beth Hunt in front of eye-catching Hemingways. TOP LEFT: Noel Hunt gave Beth a love of reading. "Before that I was just passionate about collectables." TOP RIGHT: A number of exhibits from last year's Hermanus FynArts Festival have remained in place for everyone's pleasure in Hermanus. And the stunning views are always there. ABOVE LEFT: John Morris from The Book Cottage has a passion for unusual books. ABOVE RIGHT: The Book Cottage building dates back to the 1860s.

the first person in his family to get a university degree.

"Organising libraries and information for corporates is about computers and spreadsheets. I had moved to South Africa when I realised I couldn't do this anymore, and Googled 'book shops for sale'. The Book Cottage popped up," John tells me, as we enjoy coffee in our comfy chairs. Neat bookshelves surround us and there's tranquil music in the background.

This is the oldest book shop in Hermanus, with a building that dates back to the 1860s. "Today you can order anything online," says John, "but people tell me that they come here to discover books that they would never find otherwise." I, too, find a book on World War II that I had never seen or heard of before. Indeed this is a bookshop where you might well find something you would never have seen.

17 Long Street, 028 313 0834

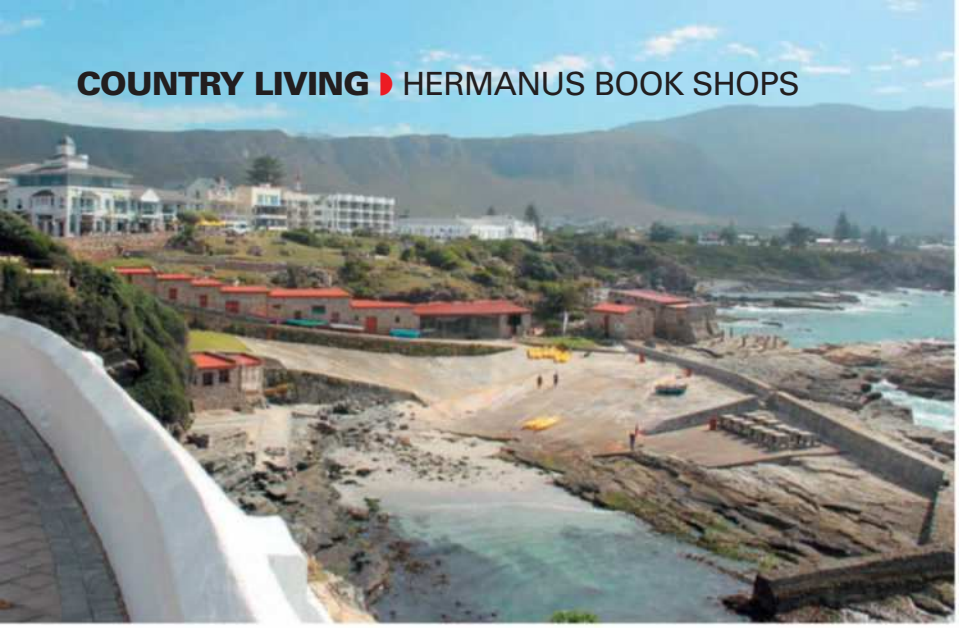
TIP Notice the music that is playing and look at John's collection of music that is for sale. You are welcome to order coffee and browse for as long as you like. Also ask to look at the book John Morris wrote called *Culture and Propaganda in World War 11*

THE BOOK COLLECTOR

It seems people who own book shops take a circuitous route to such a destination. Benadé Kruger used to be in finance and his partner Chris Steyn was a journalist.

"I had a romantic notion of a dusty, old, second-hand book shop but we decided on light and bright with a sense of space," says Chris. An interesting mix of posters of Lenin and Mao hang on the walls. "We like fun and different stuff and don't censor our content," adds Benadé. "But we feel strongly about preserving our heritage so collect books on South African history.

"We like to make books accessible, so some cost as little as R10. You don't make money running a second-hand book store – it's a lifestyle. We like to make sure that people leave with the right book." Chris fondly tells the story of a man from Mpumalanga who had been looking for a particular book since 1977. "He phoned us and could not believe that we had the book. I love those kind of stories."



ABOVE: Walk the Cliff Path, admire the Hermanus views first, and then find a book shop and put your feet up and relax. RIGHT: Corinne Hendry's humour can be found throughout Bookmark.

LEFT: Chris Steyn and Benadé Kruger debate where to file some new finds at The Book Collector. BELOW: There is no political agenda at The Book Collector – and no censorship.

The Book Collector is a keen supporter of everything local, not just in terms of clients, but also authors, and sells books by local authors such as Harvey Tyson, David Hilton-Barber and Christopher Hope.
141 Main Road, 028 313 2341

TIP Chris Steyn is the author of *Publish and Be Damned: Two Decades of Scandals*. Look out for her book. She is presently writing a book with a political history theme.

BOOKMARK

Corinne Hendry, the owner of Bookmark, has a BSc in microbiology at the University of Glasgow and worked in the AIDS field in South Africa. So where do books come in?

In the mid 90s she took a break and worked for one of the book-store chains in Johannesburg. A few years later, a customer phoned her and asked if she'd like to open her own book shop in Hermanus. Bookmark is now in its 18th year.

As a book store owner, Corinne has the winning combination of an extensive knowledge of books combined with a great sense of humour. With a Cape Cod style of decor, this bright, blue and white shop is a happy place to visit. Children have their own area upstairs and often read to one another, escaping to another world.

"My customers have wide areas of interest and I regularly overhear them recommending books to each other, which can make me feels somewhat redundant," says Corinne. "I have a passion for architecture, design, biographies and cookery, and a weakness for books with pretty jackets."

I comment on the hanging light shades made from old book pages. "Some authors' books should go straight into being shades, but I won't say who," she says with a laugh.

What she will says is, "To combine books with my love of people and the sea brings me great joy every day. There is a special energy here." I think Corinne has as much special energy as does the shop.
Twin Gables 171 Main Road
028 312 2000

TIP Corinne and her team have a wealth of book knowledge, so make sure you

ABOVE: Cheryll Hoffman from Quirk & Leopard is a demon at cleaning books.
BELOW: At the Quirk & Leopard you need a quirky sense of humour.

TOP: Bookmark's Corinne Hendry has an energy that gives her shop a special feel. ABOVE: Hermanus is renowned for whale watching but the book shops are a close second.

pick their brains. And look at the window display - it's always great fun and is rarely about books.

THE QUIRK & LEOPARD

With a name like this it's not surprising that the choice of books is a little different. "We have graphic novels and comics, and beautifully illustrated children's books, and wacky fiction in mysterious worlds with unicorns and dragons," says Cheryll Hoffman who works at the bookshop.

Cheryll tells me that the name was chosen because "when you Google it, the book shop comes up straight away. Sales from the book shop support the local Panthera Africa Big Cat Sanctuary near Stanford. Toy tigers perch on the shelves and books on animals are everywhere giving the shop a homely feel.

This must be the tidiest second-hand book shop I have ever been into. Each book is carefully wiped with alcohol and the paper edges are sanded if grubby. "We take pride in our book shop having a clean feel, where you can browse without getting grubby fingers," says Cheryll. The book sections are well laid out and its worth looking around to read the 'quirky' labels.

I went in for a good holiday read and found it, but also got waylaid by so much that was completely out of the ordinary.
173 Main Rd, 072 753 8940

TIP If you buy *The Jungle Book* 100 per cent of proceeds go to Panthera Africa because, Cheryll explains, "In the book the tiger is the baddy and we want children to realise that people are the baddies." ■

Map reference G2 see inside back cover

Dates for your Diary

- **FynArts Festival** from 8-17 June 2018 is primarily a visual and music art festival but it also celebrates books. Many of the book shops host author talks and it's a good time to do the book trail. www.hermanusfynarts.co.za
- Don't forget the **First Friday Art Walk** on the first Friday of every month when some of the book shops stay open into the evening.

5 of the best coffee shops in town
Go to www.countrylife.co.za

Between the Freeway and the Deep Blue Sea

All is not lost. On the edge of the concrete coastline of Umhlanga, a green lung still breathes

WORDS AND PICTURES ANDREA ABBOTT

ABOVE: Umhlanga Lagoon Nature Reserve, a last green lung in an urban sea. BELOW LEFT: Dunes form essential bulwarks against high tides. BELOW RIGHT: The inviting entrance to the reserve.

LEFT: The view south from the lagoon of the high-rises that characterise Umhlanga now. Note the walkway eroded by high waters. ABOVE: The breached Ohlanga River mouth. BOTTOM LEFT: An ancient gnarled stem provides habitat for many creatures in the coastal forest. BOTTOM RIGHT: Reserve manager Basil Pather (back) and guide Fortune Mbonambi alongside the horizontal stem of the enormous *Ziziphus mucronata*.

Umhlanga – Place of Reeds, favourite destination of the bucket and spade brigade, erstwhile village paradise where children, I among them, roamed unfettered in that coastal bush north of Durban and on the wide beaches.

The trampoline at Beverly Hills Hotel, bluebottle-laced waves, Tanager Tea Gardens, primordial forests, the swimming pool at the Edge of the Sea hotel – such was the domain, not all of it sanctioned, of local kids.

I can still picture Ken's Garage ('Fifty cents worth of petrol', my mother would ask), Conhill Store that stocked almost anything, Marge's Shoe Shop, my friend Louise's modest red-brick dwelling in a mystical forest down a sandy track on the seaside of Lagoon Drive, another friend, Inky's ocean-facing home where horizontal branches of a colossal tree allowed the dogs to join us in our tree house.

Today, it's all mostly gone. Existing yet are the Beverly Hills, beaches and bluebottles but Louise's and Inky's houses, the owner-run shops, tea garden, and forests where we feral children ran barefoot, are buried under high-rises. Even the beaches have changed, rising sea levels shrinking their width. But all is not lost. A greenscape remains.

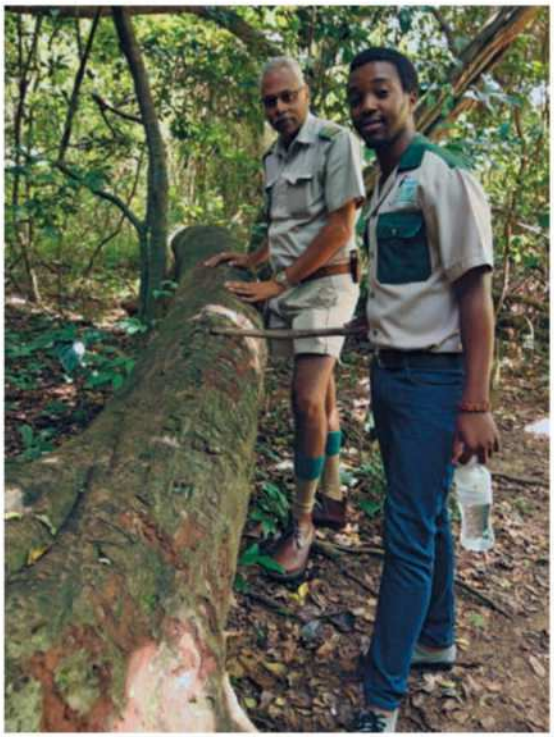
The 26-hectare Umhlanga Lagoon Nature Reserve is at the northern end of town, between the busy M4 freeway and the ocean. Along with the privately-owned Hawaan Forest on the other side of the freeway, it's one of the last green belts on the Durban coast.

Proclaimed in 1980, the reserve is within the KZN Wildlife fold. It comprises the Ohlanga River lagoon that's linked to a freshwater wetland fed by a spring rising in the forest above. Dune and coastal forests frame the lagoon and a well-maintained trail makes it easy to explore this rare wilderness.

"The reserve gives us a glimpse of what the wider area once looked like," reserve manager Basil Pather says, as we and nature guide Fortune Mbonambi meander along the trail. We pass the wetland where swallows and other reed-favouring birds flit among *Typha capensis* (bulrushes) and *Phragmites australis* (reeds) – *hlanga* in Zulu – for which Umhlanga is named. Neat-as-a-pin nests of Thick-billed Weavers decorate the greenscape and resemble baskets on stilts.

We enter the coastal forest and Fortune points out some of the characteristic trees. There's *Hibiscus tiliaceus* (lagoon hibiscus) that prevents soil erosion, *Cavacoa aurea* (Natal hickory) with its fluted stem, and its associate *Cola natalensis* (coshwood) with its crooked stem.

We arrive at a massive *Ziziphus mucronata* (buffalo thorn tree), one of the biggest of its kind I've seen. Its trunk is the circumference of a barrel and grows horizontally before it curves



upward in search of sunlight. Names etched into the bark leave scars that, Fortune tells us, never can heal. Must we carve our names in bark?

At a low-branching *Chaetachme aristata* (thorny elm) we pause. Fortune calls it a snake tree as it's favoured by mambas and other serpents waiting to ambush birds feeding on the juicy fruit.

We emerge from the forest at the lagoon that's almost empty after a rare breaching of the mouth. Woolly-necked Storks, Goliath- and Grey Herons, and Hamerkops are among stiff-legged waders on spearfishing expeditions. Their beady eyes are on fingerlings in nurseries that are the remaining puddles and perennial stream from the wetland.

A raised boardwalk traverses the lagoon. Basil is immensely proud of his Honorary Officers who renewed that walkway. "The concrete supports go deep into the mud," he says. "I thought we'd have to enlist the army but my team achieved the impossible, submerged to their waists."

On the other side, we climb to the ridge of the forested dune. Looking east through the trees, we catch glimpses of the Indian Ocean while the inland view is of the green hillside of Hawaan Forest. The pounding surf drowns the noise of M4 traffic and, although the tree canopy conceals the road, the knowledge of it is a reminder of the danger to wildlife like blue duiker that migrate from one natural area to another in search of food or a mate.

A key tree in this fragile dune forest is *Mimusops caffra* (Coastal Red Milkwood) that, by deflecting wind upward, protects inland plant communities from damaging salt-laden winds. Looking at its branching habit, I recognise the species that Inky's dogs once scaled to reach our tree house.

The trail takes us to Lookout Point at the northern edge of the dune, where we meet one of the guards whose presence has helped to eliminate crime in the reserve. On that eroding dune lies evidence of a huge shell midden that, Basil says, is thought to have been where slave trains camped en route up the coast. Between Lookout and the lagoon, a series of small dunes are remnants of bigger dunes that heavy seas and the catastrophic Cyclone Demoina levelled. Those dunes have long been famous (infamous?) as an unofficial nudist beach.

Other secrets once locked in the dunes have also been exposed. Documents provided to me by long-time Umhlanga resident, Phoebe Carnegie, refer to Stone Age shell middens and pottery found across the river. Phoebe has a long association with the reserve and was instrumental in training the first guides, an initiative Breakers Resort as a core access point has formalised.

Clued up on the local history, Phoebe tells me that Chief Mahakane, who controlled the land between the Ohlanga and the Umgeni rivers about 150 years ago, drew his drinking water from the wetland in the reserve. That wetland eventually became Umhlanga's water source – the pumphouse still stands – before the village became a boom town. The chief also took advantage of the dense forest stretching from the Umgeni right up the North Coast, to hide his cattle from rustlers.

Later, sugar baron William Campbell owned the land south of the Ohlanga. He built a holiday cottage called Edge of the Sea, which grew into the hotel of the same name and is now part of the faded snapshot of long ago.

TOP: Honorary Officers rebuilt the boardwalk across the lagoon. LEFT: A giant of the dune forest, *Mimusops caffra* (coastal red milkwood), deflects salt-laden winds upwards to protect inland plant communities. BELOW: Lookout Point at the northern edge of the dune forest.

LEFT: Northwest of the lagoon lies the Sibaya precinct that's on the brink of development. BELOW LEFT: Friend of the forests, Phoebe Carnegie has lived in Umhlanga for more than 50 years. BELOW CENTRE: Entrance to the beach at Lookout Point. BELOW: Champions of Umhlanga and its natural environment, Brian Wright (left) and Ian Hume. BOTTOM LEFT: A Woolly-necked Stork on a fishing expedition at the lagoon.

Campbell's hunting grounds encompassed the reserve. He also gave his indentured labourers sections of it to grow vegetables. "This was a rice paddy," Phoebe tells me as we cross the swampland at the start of the trail, which, she adds, was laid out by the developer of Breakers, Jeffrey Reardon, to give his guests easy access to the forest.

Today, the management of Breakers is among the drivers of an initiative that will see a superb aerial boardwalk replace the existing dune trail to Lookout Point. "The project's being carried out in partnership with the Urban Improvement Precinct (UIP) and will mean people can walk all the way from the lighthouse to Lookout Point," Basil says. "Much of the way will be wheelchair friendly."

General manager of Breakers, Ian Duthie, a UIP board director says the aim is to work with Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife to rejuvenate the reserve so that it's safe, enjoyable, and well serviced. Brian Wright, UIP project leader, says all environmental procedures and assessments have been completed and construction will start once funding is available.

The boardwalk will cover the existing trail footprint and provide managed access to and from the beach, thus preventing ad hoc access and further dune erosion. An existing ablutions facility, closed because of past vandalism, is to be transformed into a café. Interpretive signs will enhance visitor experience, an education centre is on the cards, and new, eco-tourism employment opportunities created.

But that's not all. The boardwalk is part of a bigger plan to protect the ecological integrity of the wider area through linking the green spaces of Umdloti, the developing Sibaya precinct, and Umhlanga. "The overall vision is for sustainable usage of a greater ecosystem to preserve it and protect it from urbanisation," says Brian.

That grand project is still a distant aim and a story for another time. For now though, the far-sighted guardians of Umhlanga Lagoon Nature Reserve are ensuring that future generations of children can run barefoot in natural green spaces. ■

Map reference D8 see inside back cover

Walk through Ancient Forests

Go to www.countrylife.co.za

Lowdown on the Lagoon

- Umhlanga Lagoon Nature Reserve is at the end of Lagoon Drive, immediately past Breakers Resort. www.kznwildlife.com
- Entry is free, opening times are 06h00-18h00 and there is parking for about 20 cars.
- Reserve manager Basil Pather 082 559 2839
- To book a guide, Breakers Resort 031 561 2271

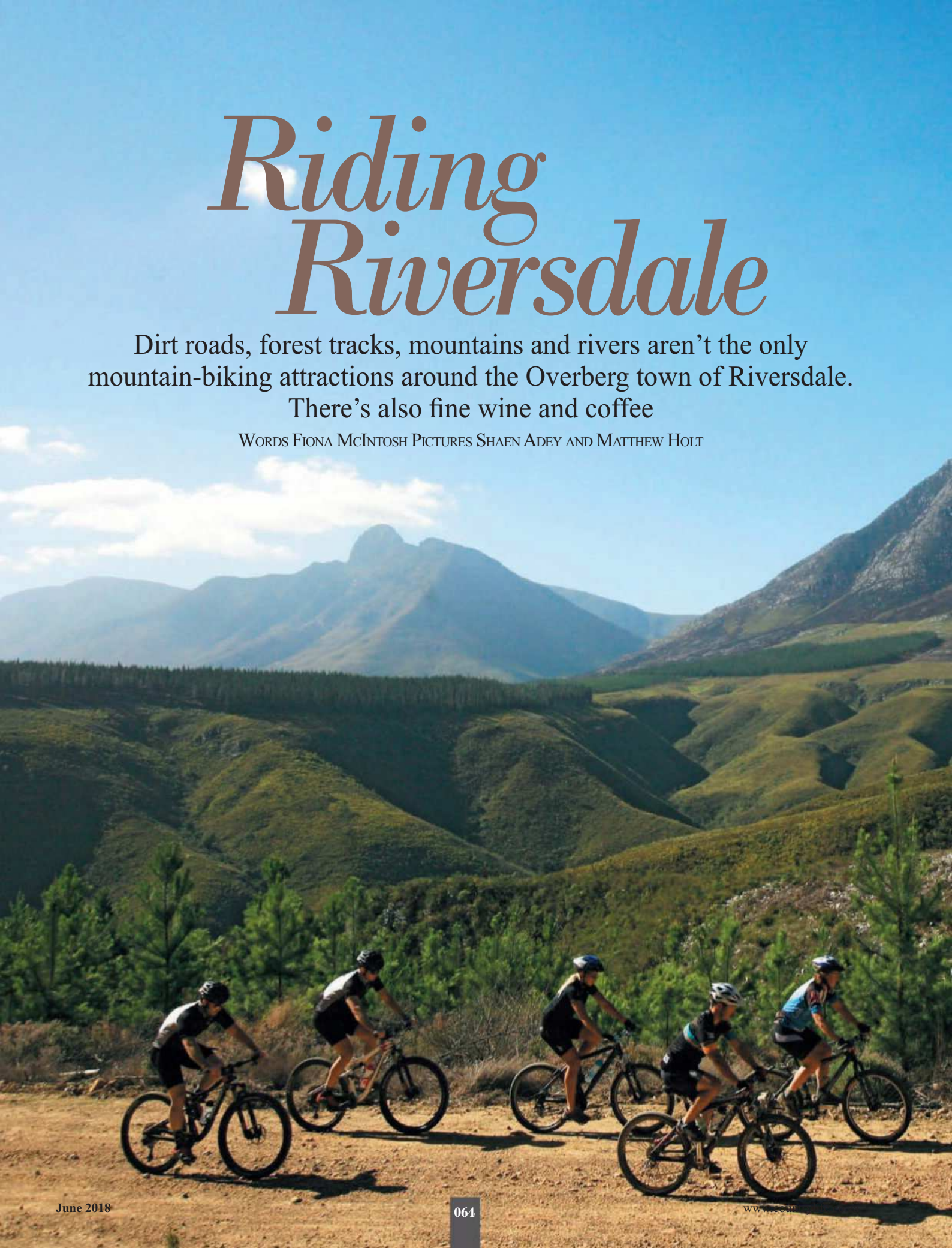
Urban Improvement Precincts

- A UIP is a city council-approved area where property owners pay a supplementary levy that's used to maintain public spaces over and above the regular municipal services.
- In the case of Umhlanga, the UIP's aim is to retain existing investment and build investor confidence; create an environment that supports vibrant and responsible business activity; improve safety, the general environment and quality of life for the benefit of all; respond to the challenge of environmental sustainability.
- info@umhlangarocksu.co.za www.umhlangauip.co.za

Riding Riversdale

Dirt roads, forest tracks, mountains and rivers aren't the only mountain-biking attractions around the Overberg town of Riversdale. There's also fine wine and coffee

Words Fiona McIntosh Pictures Shaen Adey and Matthew Holt



Up and up we go until, finally, Sleeping Beauty reveals herself in all her glory.

ABOVE: Many of the routes in the area follow roads through forest plantations. RIGHT: Abraham de Klerk, GM and winemaker at Baleia.

Alighting from the bakkie, we unload our bikes at the start of a jeep track leading up into the Langeberg mountains. The prominent summit of the highest peak in the range, Sleeping Beauty (1 343 metres), dominates the skyline. "Cor, she's well endowed," says my husband and riding companion Matthew Holt, surveying the shapely peak.

"Actually, that's her head," corrects Abraham de Klerk, general manager and winemaker at Baleia wine and olive oil estate, just outside Riversdale. But that's our only disappointment as we pedal off into the hills.

I'd driven through this southern Cape town on my numerous journeys along the N2, but until recently knew of it only for caffeine fixes at the Wimpy, and speeding fines. Lately, however, this little town – not as small as it looks – has had an injection of energy and style, and now boasts annual MTB and trail-running events, a new cycle shop, fine wine, olive- and cheese-tasting rooms, plus several chic delis serving quality cappuccinos (sadly the speed camera is still there).

A driving force behind this has been Abraham. Recently returned from Ethiopia, where he'd been making wine for Sir Bob Geldof, Abraham is a keen cyclist and trail runner. "Riversdale is a great adventure playground waiting to be explored," he had told me, when I bumped into him at the winery one day, on a trip to the Garden Route. "Instead of whizzing through you should come for a weekend and check it out."

So here I am in Ikigai artisan coffee bar and deli, as Abraham gives me the rundown on the area's trails. After breakfast we head out of town and up the Garcia Pass into the Hessequa forest, to a trail that's a local favourite known as De Bos. Several enthusiasts have ridden out from town to join me.

They're an intrepid bunch. The lean and mean (and I'm sure shaven-legged, although I forgot to look) brothers Quewin and Reece Hughes had opened Riversdale Cycles that very week. Pieter Truter started mountain biking six weeks previously but has already completed one of the country's best-known stage races, the three-day Wines2Whales.

Marilie van der Walt, an Arab-horse trainer at the local stud farm, claims to be just an occasional mountain biker, but proves to be a demon on the technical sections. Abraham is generously acting as driver and tour guide for my husband Matthew, who has torn a calf muscle.

For the first half-hour we climb along the edge of the plantation, gazing onto the extensive farmlands of the plain below.

TOP: My riding companions, Quewin Hughes, Marilie van der Walt, Pieter Truter and Reece Hughes. TOP RIGHT: The recent opening of Riversdale Cycles is a great new addition to the local biking scene. Quewin Hughes and his brother Reece sell and repair bikes, issue permits and advice and offer group rides. ABOVE LEFT: Although there are plenty of technical routes, much of the riding around Riversdale is on gravel roads – a great way to explore the area, or get training miles under your belt. ABOVE RIGHT: Reece Hughes is working on a map of the MTB routes in the area, and improving signage on the trails.

"Sheep and cattle are the main enterprises here," says Reece. The Hughes family recently relocated from Pretoria, their father swapping life as an electrical engineer for sheep farming.

"We chose Riversdale for the quality of life," says Quewin. "My wife and I are expecting our first child in July and didn't want to raise him in a small flat in Pretoria. We want to live in the countryside where he, and we, can play outside. Riversdale is thriving as more and more people tire of the drama and hassle of city life. Urban dwellers are always looking to escape, so we plan to build holiday cabins on our farm and offer MTB tours of the area."

Reece explains that the trails are maintained by local cyclists. "But my brother and I intend to extend and tidy up the existing network and mark and map the routes." Also in the making, in partnership with the Dirt Lab, is the construction of a pump track and a ten-kilometre mountain-bike track.

The sustained uphill on the gravel road continues into a wooded section, the shade a welcome break. A wild pig crashes out of the bush and across the track, giving us a hell of a fright. We are only 20 kilometres out of town, but it feels like we're deep in the wilderness.

As we crest the rise, the shapely Sleeping Beauty, queen of the Langeberg, is revealed in all her glory. Up and up we go, and the views just get better. Pieter points out a track that contours along the flank of the mountain opposite us. They are riding it the following morning, should I wish to join them.

Despite his very limited experience, Pieter already is quite the MTB fundi. "There's quite a big and extremely welcoming MTB community in Riversdale," he explains. "They took me in with open arms and showed me the ropes." He learnt fast, partly, he claims, because Riversdale has a wide variety of MTB tracks and riding surfaces.

"But I've barely touched on what the area offers," says Reece. "There are gravel farm roads, rocky climbs, tricky descents and wonderful single track – from easy to challenging, down the mountains and

ABOVE: The routes in the plantation forest are family friendly, as Marilie van der Walt points out. RIGHT: The variety of trails means you'll always find one to suit, whatever your age, level of fitness or expertise.

in the forest. And the great thing for skill development is the efficiency – the trails are close enough to town and you can put in a solid riding session in a short time.

Abraham nods in agreement. "Although there is little in the way of marked, dedicated MTB trails, the plethora of forest track means you can ride here every day for two weeks and never cover the same ground."

The climbing over, we regroup at a clearing in the trees, the start of the single track. "You don't get anything for nothing around here, you have to earn your downhill," Matthew observes. The single track is sweet, flowing over pine needles with some easy berms (banked corners). As we drop, the gradient steepens, with occasional rock steps and tree roots to negotiate. "It gets a bit more serious from now on," Abraham says, as we cross the gravel road for the second time. Deciding that discretion is the better part of valour, I duck off the technical route and speed back down the forest road to town.

That evening we braai with Elza Thiart-Botes and Adolf Botes, organisers of the annual Baleia Wines MTB Challenge & Adventure Trail Run, and who moved to Riversdale from Pretoria three years ago. (Migrants from the Jacaranda City are common in these parts). Like most Riversdale residents they wear many hats.

"Adolf has been organising dirt-bike racing events since 2010 and took over the Stilbaai Mountain Bike Challenge in 2015,"

ABOVE LEFT: All the forest trails start with a climb, but the reward is some exquisite single track. BELOW LEFT: The downhill mountain trails get steeper and more technical. But there are plenty of escape routes onto gravel road if it gets too much. BELOW: Check the barefoot rider. Lots of locals, many not regular riders, turn out for the annual MTB event.

ABOVE LEFT: When he gets a break from work Abraham de Klerk hops on his bike and goes for a quick ride. When it's not misty or covered in cloud (which it often is) you can see Sleeping Beauty from most places in Riversdale, including the winery. ABOVE RIGHT: A wine tasting, hosted by Kylie de Jager, was the perfect end to a day of exciting mountain biking. RIGHT: Thanks to the efforts of Elza Thiart-Botes and Adolf Botes, organisers of various local MTB and trail running events, Riversdale is now firmly on the radar of the mountain biking fraternity.

Elza explains, when I ask how the owners of a local wine boutique, Stilbaai Kelders, came to be event organisers. "We used to organise the South African National Off-road Motorcycle and Quad Championship but withdrew and became more involved with businesses in our area. When Abraham asked us to organise the Baleia wines event we didn't hesitate."

The first event in September 2016 was quite a challenge, she recalls. It started raining two days before the race, and the deluge continued throughout the event, but they still attracted some 60 entrants. Last year the number of participants over the three distances – 20-, 40- and 88 kilometres – had swelled to 90.

At the event the terrain covered is different to the mountain tracks, Adolf explains. "The race routes are not too technical. It's great to have riders travelling from the rest of the country to participate, but we want to make the event fun, and possible for families and local riders. On race day the boere arrive with their bicycles on the back of their farm bakkies. Some even ride to the venue." I immediately put the 2018 event in my diary.

The following day we ride more of the single track before finishing with a wine tasting at Baleia. We step outside. It's a brilliant day and the Langeberg is sharp and clear. But even after a few glasses of wine we still can't make out the features of Sleeping Beauty. ■

Map reference G3 see inside back cover

9 Fast Facts about Riversdale

Go to www.countrylife.co.za

In a Nutshell

- There are MTB routes in the Riversdale area to suit all levels of fitness and experience. You can spin to the nearby towns of Albertinia and Heidelberg along easy, circular, gravel routes. With its streams and waterfalls, the gravel trail past the Korentepoort Dam is a summer favourite.
- The forest areas off the Garcia Pass and in the Langeberg offer more challenging trails of a mixture of gravel roads and some fun and technically challenging single track. If you're in training, the 85 kilometre ride over the mountains to the Klein Karoo and back is a goodie. A scenic and challenging route, it takes in the Garcia's and Gysmanshoek passes, as well as the Korentepoort Dam.
- Three routes start at the gates of Oudebosch Guest Farm, which lies in the shadow of Sleeping Beauty between Riversdale and Heidelberg – an easy 20-kilometre route for beginners, a 44-kilometre intermediate route and an 84-kilometre route for experienced riders. Maps and GPS routes are available from the farm, that offers guest cottages.
  082 923 1469, info@oudebosch.co.za
  www.oudebosch.co.za
- Riversdale Cycles issues permits for the forest trails and gives advice on routes. Their 'shop ride' at 6am every Saturday is a popular option for visitors or those looking for riding partners.
  083 760 1551, info@riversdalecycles.com
  www.riversdalecycles.com and Facebook
- Useful day-to-day riding and event info can be found on Hessequa Cycle Club's FB page, HessequaFietsryKlub
- The third Baleia Wines MTB & Trail Run is on 8 September 2018.
  www.baleiawines.com
  BaleiaWinesMTBChallenge on Facebook

Wheatbelt Birding at its Best

The Swartrivier road near Hermanus certainly knows how to impress

WORDS ANTON ODENDAL

PICTURES ANTON ODENDAL AND BIRDLIFE OVERBERG

It's a beautiful, clear, windless day as we set off to explore the Karwyderskraal and Swartrivier roads between Hermanus and Botrivier village. A friend has asked me to show a British couple some of the birds associated with the Overberg wheatbelt and, at the top of the first hill overlooking the Karwyderskraal landfill site, the birding action starts.

Vast numbers of Spur-winged Geese feed in the recently harvested wheat field, and the first of many pairs of African Stonechats hawks insects from the wires. The cameras start working seriously, and I am, as always, amazed at how these beautiful little birds impress visitors from other countries. A pale Forest Bustard settles on a post before flying off towards some trees in the distance.

The first LBJ of the morning appears, a bird that runs in short bursts, and strangely goes over stones and grass tufts, clearly one of the pipits. I explain that larks walk far more deliberately and go around stones and grass tufts, and it's soon worked out that this is an African Pipit. But it is joined by a paler bird, maybe an immature one? It has a huge white eyebrow, streaks over the head and a very light back – a Plain-backed Pipit. This gives us the chance to study the differences between the two species.

A short distance down the road, a resident pair of Secretarybirds struts through a field in their hurried and deliberate way. A Jackal

LEFT: The Swartrivier road in August – this little dam, described in the text, features large numbers of waterbirds during such optimal conditions. RIGHT: The African Pipit is abundant in the Overberg wheatbelt. It is by far the most numerous pipit in the region. BELOW: The nocturnal Cape fox, with its characteristic bushy tail, is rarely seen along the Overberg wheatbelt. With some luck, this one, in the company of a Pied Crow, was photographed on Swartrivier road farmland.

ABOVE: The Denham's Bustard is one of the most sought-after birds in the region. The male's courtship display during early summer months is something to behold. ABOVE RIGHT: The Karwyderskraal and Swartrivier roads are often used by bird clubs on morning outings. Here is a BirdLife Overberg group at the old metal bridge over the Bot River.

ABOVE: The angulate tortoise has a straw-coloured shell with dark edges to the scutes. In the Western Cape they often have bright-red undersides. ABOVE RIGHT: Pairs of Blue Cranes break away from the large flocks in early summer. Their breeding displays and 'dances' at this time of year are stunning. RIGHT: The grey rhebok is Near Threatened and is associated with rocky outcrops and mountain slopes with good grass cover. They are common along Swartrivier road.

Buzzard stages a flypast showing a white chest. Undoubtedly, one of the highlights of the morning is a male Denham's Bustard displaying his ridiculous 'white plastic balloon' to females. The peculiar stiff-legged gait of this bird, with its inflated white throat, is ridiculous and has us in fits of laughter.

At the old metal bridge over the Botrivier a variety of waterbirds is on show. White-faced and Yellow-billed Ducks are prominent and a pair of African Black Ducks flies down river towards the estuary. In the reeds are Black Crakes and Malachite Kingfishers, and the rank vegetation around the river features many interesting species including Brimstone Canary, Bar-throated Apalis, Long-billed Crombec, Fiscal Flycatcher and Karoo Prinia.

Calls of the Red-chested Cuckoo and African Fish Eagle are heard in the distance, and several martins, swallows and swifts feed in the sky. We have to tear ourselves away from this spot and keep to our main mission of birding along the gravel Swartrivier road.

The area around the farm buildings features a variety of seed-eating birds benefiting from the cattle feedlot. Both the Diederik and Klaas's Cuckoos call from the surrounding bluegum trees – the season's war between brood parasites and unfortunate hosts has started.

The first incline away from the farm produces the endemic Grey-backed Cisticola and, excitingly, a magnificent Black Harrier quarters over the remnant patch of renosterveld. Both cormorants, together with duck and ibis species, are at the little dam to the right and some South African Shelducks feed in the stubble against the hill. My guests' list of lifers seen that morning is now climbing considerably.

Pairs of Blue Cranes are breaking away from the large flocks and it's a spectacle to see these birds displaying and dancing (camera shutters are heard continually). The Large-billed Lark is one of my favourites and its 'rusty farm-gate' calls are heard across the veld.

We are fortunate enough to discover a nest with chicks along the verge and are fascinated by the antics of the adults trying not to give away the location of the nest. Higher up against the hill is the familiar 'zit, zit, zit' call of the Zitting Cisticola. At the top, the small Cloud Cisticola shows itself.

As we move down the hill towards the little river valley, a dark shape bullets from the sky towards a flock of guineafowls. A Black

ABOVE LEFT: White Storks are often present in large numbers during summer months depending on the availability of food. Some birds tend to overwinter in the region. ABOVE: A Lanner Falcon (left) has robbed a Black-shouldered Kite of its rodent prey and here the brave little kite attempts to reclaim its booty. LEFT: Gabriëlskloof Wine Estate is a popular breakfast or lunch venue for birdwatchers travelling along the Swartrivier road.

Sparrowhawk hits one of the unfortunate birds and mantles over it as we approach. It tries to take off with its booty, but clearly the guineafowl is too heavy. Now two Pied Crows attack the raptor and drive it off towards the horizon. The somewhat bedraggled guineafowl is yelling its head off, but seems okay.

Further down the valley we are entertained by wheatbelt regulars such as the Bokmakierie, Red-capped Lark, Cape Longclaw and Capped Wheatear. A few White Storks work the stubble and my guests particularly enjoy several Alpine Swifts passing through at great speed.

But then comes yet another special of our region – I hear the distinctive breeding display call of Cape Clapper Larks and we eventually locate them. The fast wing-beat as the bird takes to the sky, and the ascending whistle as it drops to the ground, have to be experienced.

In the reeds as we approach the little bridge over the Swartrivier, we spot a nesting Purple Heron, and hear the 'rainbird' call of a Burchell's Coucal in the distance. On the bridge are Red-billed Teals, and Common Moorhens are feeding their chicks. Most excitingly, an African Marsh-Harrier slowly works its way over the reeds. The calls of Cape Grassbird and Neddicky come from the hill.

Up the next hill we find farm labourers busy with some fairly late harvesting, which creates a memorable show. No less than seven Yellow-billed Kites, four Common Buzzards and a Jackal Buzzard, together with droves of Western Cattle Egrets, swoop around the tractors, several coming away with rodents and locusts. What a performance.

After an early lunch at the Gabriëlskloof Wine Estate, a tradition on these outings, we return home and see much of the same birds, although they're significantly slower in the middle of the day. I am delighted to find a pair of Namaqua Doves, a species not too numerous in our area.

A Verreaux's Eagle glides over the hills towards Botrivier village. First prize on our birding excursion is a Lanner Falcon robbing a Black-shouldered Kite of its rodent prey. The kite is joined by its partner as they chase the falcon, eventually disappearing towards the estuary. The aerial manoeuvres of this chase are magnificent.

Our total for the morning is 119 species, 19 endemic and two guests adding 34 lifers. Proof indeed that the Karwyderskraal and Swartrivier roads belong on every local birdwatcher's wishlist. ■

Map reference G2 see inside back cover

SEASON & WEATHER

The weather is generally mild and birding opportunities are good throughout the year, but the famous canola and wheat season in August and September is great for landscape photography. Birding is not advised during very windy and wet conditions.

HABITATS

The Overberg wheatbelt has been modified through agricultural activities, and rambling roads thread their way through an undulating tapestry of changing colours in these lowland landscapes. These monoculture landscapes produce excellent birdwatching, with good numbers of endemic species on offer. Small pockets of remnant fynbos and renosterveld, as well as farm dams, increase the species diversity of the region.

SPECIALS

Denham's Bustard
Grey-backed Cisticola
Cape Clapper Lark
Blue Crane
Black Harrier
Secretarybird

GETTING THERE

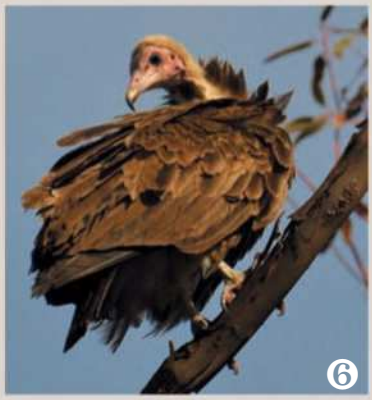
The Karwyderskraal road is clearly signposted just after Fisherhaven when travelling along the R43 from Hermanus to Botrivier village. The gravel Swartrivier road stretches from the farmstead on the Karwyderskraal road to the N2 at Gabriëlskloof Wine Estate near Botrivier village. It is signposted at the farmstead. The Swartrivier road is signposted along the N2 between Botrivier and Caledon.

ACTIVITIES

The Karwyderskraal and Swartrivier roads offer the best Overberg wheatbelt birdwatching close to Hermanus and Cape Town. The area also offers visitors the chance of comparing the difficult LBJs of the region, and seeing the region's specials and endemics. Along the Swartrivier road, stop off at Gabriëlskloof Wine Estate for tea, breakfast or lunch, and even some wine tasting. Detailed descriptions of birding opportunities along the Karwyderskraal and Swartrivier roads are available at www.westerncapebirding.co.za/overberg/routes.php?id=16&open=312#route312

ENQUIRIES

082 550 3347, birding@overberg.co.za



CHECKLIST Top 10 birds to see in the Overberg Wheatbelt

1. Occuring in hilly and mountainous habitats, the endemic **Jackal Buzzard** (*Rooiborsjakkalsvoël*) feeds on birds, frogs, insects, small mammals and reptiles. Huge plumage variations in adults range from large white breast patches to more common rufous breast patches.

2. The **Capped Wheatear** (*Hoëveldskaapwagter*) is characterised by its contrasting white throat and eyebrow and black breast band, face and crown. Its upright stance is typical in its preferred habitat of stock pens and over-grazed areas.

3. Regarded as Near Threatened, our national bird the **Blue Crane** (*Bloukraanvoël*) does occur abundantly in the Overberg Wheatbelt. Flocks are found in non-breeding season.

4. The hugely sought-after and endemic **Cape Clapper Lark** (*Kaapse Klappertjie*) is unobstrusive when not displaying, but fairly common in fields along the Swartrivier road. It is best known for its aerial display.

5. As it struts its way along these farmlands, through short grassy vegetation, the endemic **Cape Longclaw** (*Oranjekeelkalkoentjie*) is unmistakable. The loud cat-like 'meeuw, meeuw, meeuw' call gives its presence away. This image clearly illustrates why it is called a longclaw.

6. The Swartrivier road has a reputation for producing vagrant species not usually found in the region, such as Common Cuckoo, European Honey Buzzard, Crowned Eagle and Red-backed Shrike, and, surprisingly, the **Hooded Vulture** (*Monnikaasvoël*) found here in November 2017.

7. The **Black-headed Heron** (*Swartkopreier*) forages away from water, but roosts and breeds at water. It utilises a diverse range of prey items in these farmlands. Here this opportunist takes a mole snake – other victims include moles, small reptiles and birds up to the size of doves.

8. The popular **African Stonechat** (*Gewone Bontrokkie*) is probably the most photographed bird in the Overberg wheatbelt. Pairs are often found along the gravel roads and, interestingly, the male plays very little role in the nest-building or breeding process.

9. In summer when vast numbers occur, the **Common or Steppe Buzzard** (*Bruinjakkalsvoël*) represents a huge identification problem. They are easily confused with immature Jackal Buzzards and Forest Buzzards, a problem compounded by the huge colour variations ranging from pale to chocolate brown.

10. The Karwyderskraal road features a breeding pair of **Secretarybirds** (*Sekretarisvoël*) often seen from the R43. This is a brilliant addition to the species diversity of the region, because the numbers of this iconic bird have decreased dramatically in recent years.

Tigers Take No Prisoners

On the Upper Zambezi GEORGE ROBEY prepares for battle with every freshwater angler's toughest adversary – that alpha predator with the disposition of a high-dollar debt collector. The ferocious tiger

Garreth Coombes stands bathed in soft morning light, slightly crouched, one foot ahead of the other, his torso swaying with every sweep of the rod, and his fly line unfolding in classical loops. A ballet unlike any other.

It's daybreak in the eastern Caprivi. A Coppery-tailed Coucal wails its haunting song, egrets pass in small family clusters and, out of nowhere, a squadron of Whiskered Terns whistle overhead and splash into a school of hapless baitfish.

Garreth's streamer fly lands quietly against a patch of

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Well-known fishing guide Garreth Coombes remains one of a handful of anglers who pioneered the winter flyfishing technique. ● The wild Upper Zambezi along the eastern Caprivi. Home of the magnificent tiger fish. ● Villagers who live along the Zambezi use the river as a travel corridor and employ wooden canoes, called mokoros. ● Hippos are a regular sight. River guides understand how to fish safely in the company of these magnificent but dangerous animals. ● Our comfortable tents in the bush on Zambezi islands. ● Jacana birds, often called Lily Trotters, are a common inhabitant of the Upper Zambezi.

leaning pampas grass. He allows it to settle then strips rapidly to impart a teasing action. I remain in my seat, enthralled by the moment, the poetry of a well-laid fly line and the stillness of the morning. In a wink, tranquillity turns to chaos.

Garreth staggers, his body spins and the boat rocks. It's as if he's been hit by high-power voltage. Fly line bounces off the deck and sings through the rod guides as the savvy angler feathers his reel spool to slow the charge. An angry tiger fish breaches next to the boat then plunges out of sight into the deep. All of this before my friend can bellow the fisherman's war cry, 'Fish on!'

The tiger speeds blindly through the river channel, cutting and whirling but unable to throw the hook, and then takes to the air in a series of magnificent aerobatic leaps. Garreth has caught hundreds, if not thousands, of Zambezi tigers and has tricks of his own. He dips his rod tip into the water and maintains pressure.

Eventually, the heavy fish tires, comes unwillingly to the surface and languishes on its side. I scoop it into the net and heave it aboard. It's a Zambezi trophy, several pounds north of ten. We take photos, revive the weary fish and watch it disappear into the dusky water.

"There's nothing like it," Garreth tells me of tiger fishing. He has travelled the world with fly rod in hand and has not yet found a tougher freshwater adversary. That includes the golden dorado of Argentina, a distant cousin of the African tiger called El Tigre de la Ria (Tiger of the River) and a notch above the esprit of the Amazon's peacock bass.

It's no surprise that the African tiger fish remains topside on every angler's wish list. The alpha predator comes armed with a mouthful of sharp canines, a shielded bony head and the disposition of a high-dollar debt collector. The pugnacious tiger takes no prisoners in its daily battle for survival and earns praise as one of the world's greatest game fish. Thanks to Garreth, we are poised to do battle with more of these five-star striped water dogs.

My journey to Sekoma Island Lodge on the Upper Zambezi begins on short notice. Garreth calls to say he has a few free days from guiding and that fishing is great. The flood plains are draining into the main river channel and unloading schools of baitfish for marauding packs of hungry tigers.

"No need to bring flies, I have plenty. . . bring 8 and 9 weight rods with quality reels that have strong drags [brakes] and lots of backing," Garreth advises. He has already reserved a place for me at Sekoma's second camp, Ilombe Island Lodge. How can I resist?

ABOVE LEFT: Fishing boats dock at Illombe Island Lodge. ABOVE RIGHT: Little sums up Africa's beauty better than a Zambezi sunset. LEFT: A local villager shows us the bounty of his catch. The small fish called bulldogs are a staple food source for tiger fish. RIGHT: Our guide Robert Sekute nets a thrashing tiger fish for Garreth. BELOW: Flocks of Common Egrets trade back and forth along the river system.

I hang up the phone and book my flight to Livingstone, Zambia.

Within the week, I'm bouncing down a Zambian dirt road in a chauffeured van with fellow South African anglers George Kotras and Richard Strever. The drive feels short with all the storytelling, and soon we transfer into a large canopied boat pointed toward the island. Friendly villagers in mokoros wave and Openbill Storks soar in the thermals.

It's late afternoon when our boat eases into the slip on Ilombe Island and smiling staff members greet us with cooldrinks. We are guided to our cosy tents, mine close to the river's edge. I unpack quickly and grab a chair on the front deck. Hippos grunt in the distance, White-browed Robin-Chats begin their evening serenade, and soon the drone of a boat motor disrupts the quiet.

The engine dies and the crunch of gravel betrays a nose-first landing. I walk the short distance from my tent to the river and hear Garreth instruct a young guide to secure the boat and tackle. It's nearly dark and the skyline silhouettes him. We greet one another and walk a sandy trail to the main lodge. "We had big rains this year and fishing has been great. I want to see you catch good tigers." Garreth flashes his quick, trademark smile.

Garreth is the marketing director for Sekoma/Ilombe Lodges and an in-demand river guide who earns rightful acclaim as a tough, clever, hardcore, never-say-die angler, but there is a much greater human side to this impassioned habitué of the Zambezi. Garreth has a heart the size of Africa, a joyful presence bigger than life itself, and limitless compassion for everyone he meets. To know Garreth is to know that big things come in small packages.

Darkness arrives quickly and our squad of fellow fly anglers arrives one by one at the main dining lapa. We enjoy an ample buffet before huddling around the campfire to share fishing tales. It's cold enough that we all wear fleece jackets. Winter is the prime season for fly rods and tiger fish. Soon, the cold night air chases us to warm beds and dreams of what lies ahead.

The morning boat ride brings on chills. Despite my heavy winter gear, my teeth chatter and I turtle deep inside my jacket. Garreth, seemingly oblivious to the biting wind, selects flies, trims them to shape and rigs them on wire trace. He tells me the bigger tigers have been feeding on smaller baitfish, as he scissors away a large Clouser fly until it looks like something used for dainty trout.

Garreth the companion is personable, extrovert and fun. Garreth the fly angler is a motivated, pedantic loner who dwells on minutiae. It serves him well. A passion for big tigers and his attention to detail has made him one of the most respected guides on the Zambezi.

"Most people follow the terns and work their flies in the middle of the bait balls.

TOP RIGHT: Ivy Nangombe meets us at the boat and offers a shot of sherry, a gift from the mighty River God, Nyami Nyami. ABOVE RIGHT: Happy Gauteng fly angler, George Kotras with a trophy Zambezi tiger fish. LEFT: Sekoma fishing guide Robert Sekute shows two of his favourite tiger-fish flies. RIGHT: Don't neglect the late-winter season to tangle with a giant Nembwe bream, another trophy fish in high demand by river anglers.

They catch lots of juvenile fish in the five to eight-pound range. I like to target fish over ten pounds and they are not found there," Garreth says of his solitary approach.

He explains that tigers group together by size, with most of the schooling fish under ten pounds. The smaller tigers work in concert to viciously attack balls of forage washed into the river from the receding flood plains. The big solitary tigers hang nearby at the edges of the melee, lazily picking off crippled bait fish or morsels adrift in the current.

We stop the boat at the confluence of a river channel where an underwater sandbar reveals the current break. We are alone, somewhere near the tribal village of Madombe. Garreth instructs me to cast into the channel and retrieve the fly along the outer edge of the sandbar. My first cast with the altered, diminutive fly is a good one. I allow the weighted fly to sink and begin my retrieve by stripping line rapidly to mimic a darting baitfish.

What happens next is hard to explain. It's like a punch to the gut or a high-speed collision. The take of a tiger is vicious. The strike catches me off guard, but I soon gather my wits and fight the fish to finality. It comes in a few ounces shy of ten pounds and causes me to ponder how a much bigger tiger must feel on the end of a fly rod.

Garreth and I fish throughout the day and land a few more tigers. Garreth casts with the ease of a master. He knows something many anglers do not – a flyfisher casts the line instead of the lure. The birdlife is spectacular and Garreth identifies many new species for my list. We fish among pods of hippos and pass large Nile crocodiles basking in the afternoon sun.

A few hours later, beneath a fiery twilight sky, we dock the boat at Ilombe Island. Ivy Nangombe greets us with a snifter of sherry and pours two jiggers, a gift from the river god Nyami Nyami. I savour every drop and thank the tribal spirit for his generous gift. Garreth does likewise. It's the perfect end to the day.

We fish for several more days, joined by Robert Sekute, one of Sekoma's top guides. Robert grew up in the region and has vast knowledge of the flora and fauna and fishing tactics. He huddles with Garreth to discuss strategy and location and we continue to catch fish. Try as I might, ten pounds would remain my largest of the week. A trophy by any standard.

Soon, it is time to depart. I leave camp reluctantly, not for want of a bigger fish but for the absence of good friends, evening campfires, wild places and the bustling Zambezi heartbeat. I take one last look at the river before boarding the homeward-bound bus, and vow a quick return. ■

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What's Brewing in the Overberg?

ANN GADD creates an impromptu, scenic craft-beer route from Elim to Stanford and Botrivier

WORDS AND PICTURES ANN GADD

Wine routes in the Western Cape come by the crateful, but no official craft-beer routes appear to exist. Yet, we're a nation of beer drinkers with a beer consumption that's more than three times that of wine, next on the list of most-consumed alcoholic drinks. In fact, drinking beer in South Africa, by volume, accounts for more consumption than do all the other booze categories combined.

This lack of official craft-beer routes then is a situation that needs to be rectified. So I decide to create my own daytrip, which promises a combination of great artisanal beer and the scenic beauty of the Overberg, an area that includes the Agulhas Plain with its 1 751 plant species. Planning the route with husband Anthony, we reach an agreement that he will be the designated driver.

We can't resist stopping at the eclectic Dassiesfontein farmstall on the N2, about ten kilometres on the Cape Town side of Caledon, to stock up on essential date balls (her) and biltong (him). It's a great shopping experience for all things weird and wonderful in the farming world and more.

The Akkedisbergpas (R326) off the N2 at Caledon is an excellent tarred road. The previous gravel road dated back to 1776 and was one of the earliest passes built in South Africa. It's also our southernmost pass and features mountain views and prolific fynbos.

The name translates as Lizard Mountain Pass, although no-one can say for sure whether that's due to a hill near the Bakkrans that is said

ABOVE: Fraser's Folly produces the only condensed milk and coffee flavoured beer (stout) in South Africa – Moer Koffee.
LEFT: Dirk Human and Fraser Crighton share a laugh while discussing the latest brew.
RIGHT: The Fraser's Folly tasting tray.

ABOVE: The Akkedisberg Pass is full of beautiful surprises as its gradually meanders towards the coast. LEFT: The labels at Birkenhead Brewery were created by a local artist. RIGHT: Pieter Serfontein, manager at Birkenhead. "I do everything but brew the beer," he quips. BOTTOM: Sacks of malted barley ready for use at Birkenhead.

to resemble a lizard, or the number of *bloukop-koggelmandertjies* (blue-headed lizards) found in the area.

Lady Anne Barnard called the pass 'Clyne Riviere Cloof' when she crossed it, describing it as '… not steep but stony, and dangerous from the frequent slopings of the road'. At the time, it was the preferred route between Caledon and the sea, rather than alongside the Botrivier.

Before we reach Stanford, we take the dirt road left for Papiesvlei and Doornbosch. The road winds through pine forests and fynbos, with little hint of civilisation. We spot several troops of baboons idling along the roadside, but otherwise it's deserted.

Having left work behind, we start to relax into roadtrip mood because, like life, beer is best enjoyed when chilled. Just east of Elim, we arrive at Fraser's Folly brewhouse on the Black Oystercatcher wine farm. It's the most southerly craft brewery in Africa – the original Fraser's Folly brewery was situated in Struisbaai.

There, we're met by British-born brewmaster, Fraser Crighton and Black Oystercatcher owner, Dirk Human, who take us on a tour of the brewery, before we sit down to taste the beers. Fraser tells us about his journey to becoming a brewmaster, "I actually have a degree in oenology from Plumpton College in the UK. In Brighton, I met my South African wife, Marile. Tired of the UK weather, we relocated to Struisbaai and, finding a huge gap then in the craft-beer market, I switched from winemaking to my hobby of brewing beer, and started an English-style brewery."

Sitting on the restaurant's veranda, idly watching cows in the field across the road, we wait for Fraser to return from the brewery, with glasses of the four main ingredients of beer – hops (in the form of pellets), malt, yeast and water. It's that simple. Play around with these ingredients and you can get any number of beer varieties.

"You need to understand the water, as it accounts for roughly 96 per cent of the beer," says Fraser. "Soft water (low pH) will create pale beers, while dark beers need harder water. Wine is dependent on its terroir, whereas with beer you can manipulate to get a desired outcome. But we don't use chemicals or stabilisers in our beer."

A tasting tray arrives, labelled with the name of each beer. We sip the 'session' beers first (beers you can drink all day – like Weizen, Pilsner and Pale Ale), and then move into the darker territory of Indian Pale Ale and creamy Moer Koffie Stout. "We teamed up with the guys from Beer Country to produce this essentially South African beer," says Fraser.

"We tried a breakfast beer that didn't work. We then created Moer Koffie Stout but it didn't come easy and took us months. But the result is fantastic – a nose of bold coffee, caramel and dark chocolate with smoke. It won a gold medal at the South African National Beer Trophy event." When in doubt, drink a stout, which I do, and I'm intrigued by the yummy condensed milk/coffee aftertaste. "Everyone told me making beer was a foolish venture –

ABOVE: Analize and Mark ter Morshuizen with Anchen Burt, sell 90 per cent of the beer they make from their own premises at Honingklip Breweries. ABOVE RIGHT: A tempting frosty brew at Honingklip. RIGHT: The kegs at Honingklip Brewery. BELOW: Marietjies Pub and Grill at Baarskeerdersbos is a great place to stop off for a simple bite to eat.

I started with 100 litres a month," says Fraser. "Now we're producing 8 000 litres a month. South Africa truly is a land of opportunity."

Fraser and Dirk describe the beers and brewing processes and, as a result, I'm increasing my knowledge of beer and brewing considerably. "It takes one to two years to get a bottle of white wine to retail, whereas beer takes only a month," adds winemaker Dirk Human, "so it's a far faster turnaround process".

As I sip my Moer Koffie (and it's going down really well), I avoid making eye contact with the designated driver and his glass of sparkling water. Fraser insists that I also sample the spirit he makes from the beer (80 per cent proof) to clean the equipment. My driver (aka Anthony the Handbrake), is indicating that it's time to leave…

We head back west through the quaint village of Elim, an old Moravian mission station lined with picturesque whitewashed cottages, and on to the artsy village of Baardskeerdersbos. Here we drop in at Marietjies Pub and Grill, and I order a cappuccino. The waitress looks at me as if I have ordered an assassination. "We don't do cappuccinos. We have *moerkoffie* or the bar is open." (I really would prefer another Fraser's Folly Moer Koffie right now).

In Stanford, at the Birkenhead Brewery, (named after the famed ship that was sunk off Gansbaai in 1852, where a staggering 450 lives were lost), we meet the manager Pieter Serfontein). Birkenhead Brewery, he informs me, was the third craft brewery started in South Africa, and the first opened in the Western Cape, in 1998. (Mitchell's Knysna Brewery was the first brewery, followed by the Nottingham Road Brewing Company in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands.

Birkenhead now produces about 13 000 litres a month, making it one of the biggest craft breweries in South Africa. It also produces craft beers for smaller craft breweries, as many small craft brewers don't have their own equipment and contract the beer making out to bigger producers.

"Honey Blonde (Pilsner) is the favourite choice of most customers," Pieter tells me. Like the other two breweries I visit, Birkenhead produces additional small-volume beers, over and above their usual line-up. For instance, they produce a chocolate stout in winter. "Making these small-volume beers provides variety for our customers and allows our brewers to experiment and explore."

Tasting the beers, I decide that I enjoy the Dead Parrot American Pale Ale the best, but this may be influenced by the name's link to the delightful Monty Python sketch. I love the quirky names given to the various craft beers produced throughout the country, like Rye the Beloved Country, Lager then life, Bonecrusher, The Dogfather and Zero to Hero.

"Brewers," Pieter jokes, "are glorified janitors. We spend one hour a day brewing and the rest of the day cleaning and sterilising.

LEFT: A brilliantly coloured field of harvested wheat greets us on our Overberg beer route.

Each area has its problems when it comes to making beer. We fortunately don't have a water problem, but transport is a cost issue, particularly as 20 per cent of our production goes to Gauteng."

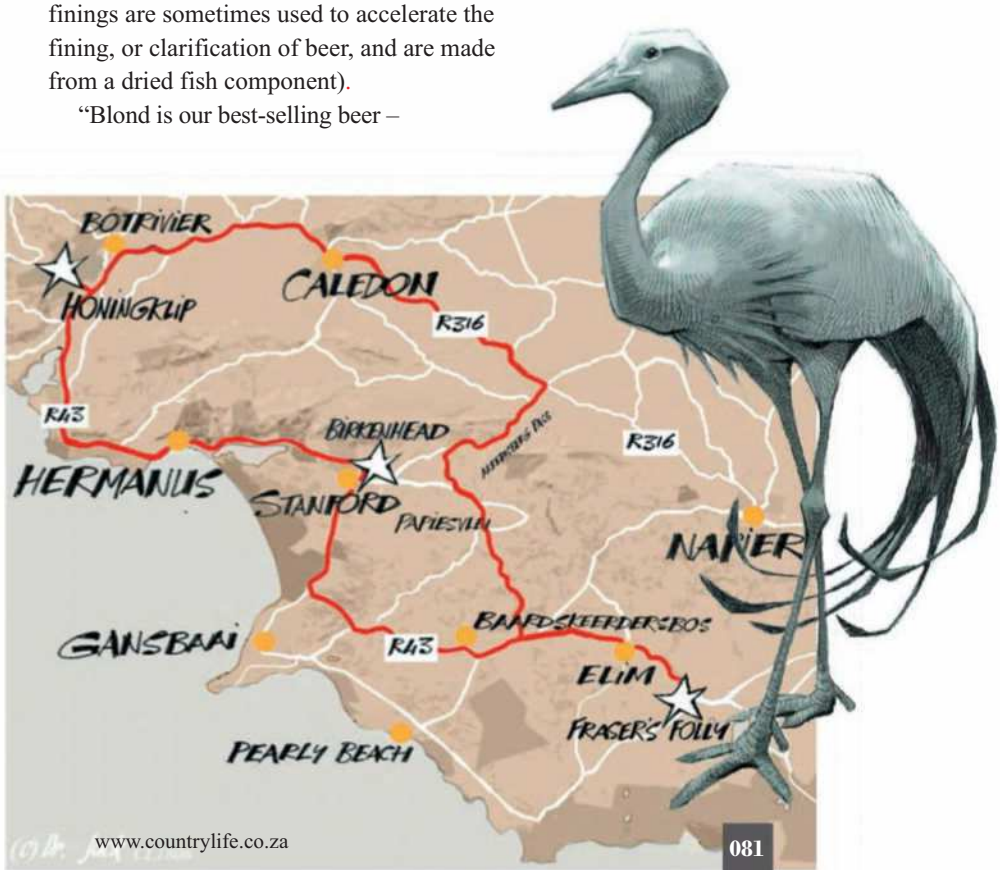
Later, at Honingklip Brewery, on Honingklip Farm in the Botrivier area, I am greeted by Analize and Mark ter Morshuizen, who tell me about the Belgian-inspired ales they've been producing since 2012. They have seven beer varieties together with a monthly special, one of which they tell me is a granadilla beer brewed in the granadilla season, which I'm keen to taste.

Honingklip is the smallest of the three breweries I visit, producing around 2 400 litres a month. They use a boiler fining, made from seaweed. "You can say we're a true vegan beer," Mark quips. (Isinglass finings are sometimes used to accelerate the fining, or clarification of beer, and are made from a dried fish component).

"Blond is our best-selling beer – its closest to what people are used to. It's a 100 per cent barley malt, Belgium Blonde-style beer and a more flavoursome replacement for a lager," explains Mark. It's a busy time for the restaurant and brewery, so we bid farewell and leave them to serve their customers. It's time to head for the hills of home. I may not have saved any ales, but I've certainly nurtured a few. ■

Map reference G2 see inside back cover

- **Fraser's Folly Breweries** Monday to Friday 09h00-19h00, Saturday 10h00-14h30, closed Sunday. 028 482 1618
- **Birkenhead Breweries** Open daily 10h00-17h00. 028 341 0013
- **Honingklip Breweries** Open daily 10h00-18h00 (in season). 082 735 9868, 082 542 6484
- All these breweries have restaurants.



Know Before You Go

- Allow a full day or better two for the trip. Our 2x4 car handled the dirt roads with ease, but after heavy rain or in lower suspension cars, the option of the tarred roads may be advisable.
- The 1 500km² Agulhas Plain lies between the lagoon at Stanford and Africa's Southernmost tip, Cape Agulhas. It forms part of the Cape Floristic Region (CFR), one of the richest floras in the world, and the smallest of earth's six plant kingdoms. It's also a great spot for birding.
- Inland towns in the Agulhas Plain are Stanford, Napier, Elim and Bredasdorp while Gansbaai, Arniston, Struisbaai and Pearly Beach comprise its coastal towns.

Stop Here for More Beer

- **Hermanus Breweries** is the 2017 SA National Beer Trophy gold medal winner for best craft lager – Old Harbour Lager. 028 312 1788, 11 Mimosa St, Hermanus.
- **Folk & Goode Craft Beer** at Newton Johnson Family Vineyards on the R320, Hemel-en-Aarde Valley has Pale ale, an India Pale Ale, a Pinot Noir barrel-aged ale and an Enlightened Ale. No beer tastings for now, but they plan to do so in the future. 028 312 3862, wine@newtonjohnson.com

Did You Know?

- Prize for the top beer-drinking country in the world goes to the Czech Republic with 1 42.4 litres per person annually (about 250 pints, or a beer every 35 hours). They've held the top spot for more than 20 years.
- South Africa, with a mere 58.4 litres' consumption per person, is 41st but, closer to home, Namibia is in fifth place with 102.7 litres per person. For overall beer consumption by a country, Nigeria heads the African race.
- Mesopotamia (today most of Iraq, Kuwait and parts of Turkey and Syria), is credited with brewing the first beer around 7 000 BC.
- Beer beats wine as the world's most popular alcoholic drink and, in drinks in general, places fourth after water, tea and coffee.
- The two main types of beer are ale and lager. Ales are the oldest style of beer. Lagers starting to be brewed several 100 years ago.
- Cenosillicaphobia is the fear of an empty glass.

Glamping

Find luxury and style in amongst Mother Nature

1 KwaZulu-Natal

Monzi's Safaris Tented Camp

St Lucia

Unlike most glamping spots, Monzi's is in the centre of St Lucia, so the fact that it's self-catering isn't a problem if you're not culinary inclined – there are good restaurant options within easy walking distance. Breakfast is offered at the camp by request. Although Monzi's doesn't have the wide-open spaces of a game reserve, it does offer the excitement of camping with the luxury of a warm shower and comfortable beds. The tents are on wooden stilts and the bathrooms have brick walls. Each unit is well insulated against ever-persistent mosquitos and has a raised deck for sundowners, with views over the canopy of trees that camouflage the wooden structures. The stairs may make some of the units less appealing for elderly guests. If you want to be sociable, the open central area has a well-equipped kitchen and communal cooking facilities. There is also a braai area. An essential rule, which I loved, is that no guests are to do any washing up. There are two pools with loungers for those days when you feel like just chilling. They have a strictly no-noise policy, so if you are planning a wild party with a group of friends, then this may not be the place for you. Personally, I enjoyed the peace. Take one of their safaris – groups or private – to Cape Vidal and Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park.– *Ann Gadd*

035 590 1697, info@monzisafaris.com, www.monzisafaris.com

2 Garden Route
AfriCamps at Ingwe
Plettenberg Bay

To say my last two camping trips were unsuccessful would be an understatement, so the thought of camping without actually having to camp was rather appealing. That's exactly what AfriCamps at Ingwe offers. Canvas tents in natural surrounds complete with enamel coffee mugs and the traditional campfire, but with all the creature comforts we non-campers battle to live without. This includes a fully equipped kitchen with a fridge and gas stove, spacious bathroom with an enormous shower, and beds to die for, with crisp white linen and puffy duvets. Fluffy blankets, electric blankets and a wood-burning stove put paid to those cold Plett evenings. What I loved most were the rustic touches – the use of corrugated iron and plenty of natural wood throughout ensure that these tents (there are six in total in the camp) don't feel like you're cheating too much on your 'camping' experience. But if you do want to up the glam you could always order 'room service' in the form of a scrumptious breakfast basket or traditional braai pack (sorry, it's all DIY when it comes to the cooking), both delivered daily to your tent, or hire a private chef to come and do your braaiing for you. To walk it all off, there's an easy-to-moderate two-kilometre circular forest walk that takes in parts of the indigenous forest, including an original logging trail.

– Bronwyn Mulrooney

063 170 4222, hello@africamps.com, www.africamps.com

3 Eastern Cape
Woodbury Tented Camp
Amakhala Game Reserve

If you're not into roughing it but appreciate the romance that camping offers, then glamping is for you. This combination of glamour and camping describes a genteel way of 'submitting to hardships'. Woodbury Tented Camp, an intimate, family-run camp with heartfelt service, turns adversities into exciting escapades. Game drives through spectacular landscapes had us searching for at least one of the Big Five – and the animal gods delivered. Boating down the Bushman's River is a popular activity. We, however, chose to explore the reserve on horseback – no Big Five in a certain section. Waking to birdsong and having a full day of outdoor activities meant we were ready for the comfort of our luxury tent with kingsize bed (we could have chosen twin beds) that night. A scrumptious brunch, high tea and three-course dinner were served with friendly, local hospitality – and the sunset game drive delivered a perfect African evening, as well as tantalising snacks and drinks. There are eight well-appointed, en suite tents and two large family tents, all on raised bases and discretely 'hidden' in the bush. Just 75 kilometres from Port Elizabeth, this is a place where you can hear the bush breathe. *– Olivia Shaffer*

042 235 1109, 042 235 1141, www.woodburytentedcamp.co.za

4 Western Cape
Storytellers
Agter-Pakhuis, Cederberg

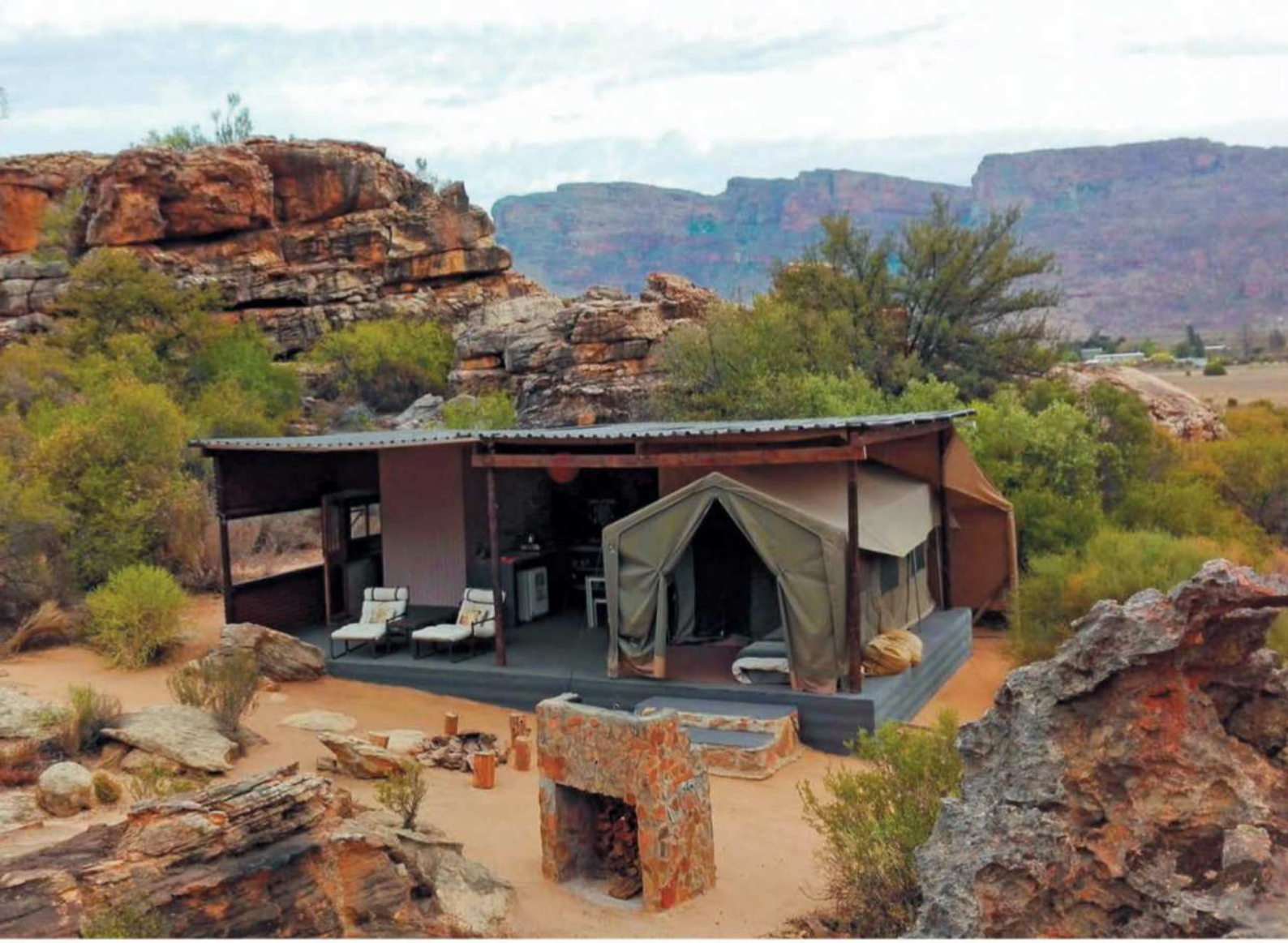
Lovingly named after the animals that live in the surroundings, Porcupine Place, Dassie Den and Tortoise Terrace provide an opportunity to enjoy the peace of the wild, rugged Rocklands area in comfort. The outdoors is yours to savour in Storytellers' off-the-grid glamping accommodation. As you drive out of Clanwilliam onto the Pakhuis Pass and beyond, find yourself far away from the busy-ness of the world. Nature is on your doorstep as you soak in a hot tub, watch the rocks turn gold at the tail-end of the day, and celebrate the richness of life under the constellations of the night sky. Rest up in your hammock with a good book, walk to the dam for a refreshing dip, enjoy a wine and olive-oil tasting on the neighbouring farm, join the boulderers to scale the rock faces, and explore the Pakhuis Pass with its rock art and distinctive Cederberg character. Further afield, take a slow drive to the Bidouw Valley in flower season when it transforms into bright and boundless beauty, and to nearby Wuppertal for an interesting off-the-beaten-track excursion. Sitting snuggly between fynbos and rock, the three tented units have private bathrooms (with handmade organic soap), fully-equipped kitchens and outdoor braai areas. Your escape from the rigours of civilisation has never been so easy. – *Ron Swilling*

027 470 0057, 082 862 7372, 071 179 7972, www.thestorytellers.co.za

5 Namibia
Chobe River Camp
Zambezi Region

Set on the riverbank, opposite the Chobe National Park, a few kilometres from the Ngoma border post, this laid-back rustic camp offers superb wildlife viewing when the river is high and the Chobe floodplains fill with water. Buffalo, elephant, water-adapted antelope like sitatunga, and myriad bird species move onto the floodplains. The spectacular wildlife show can be enjoyed on the camp's daily boat trips, a highlight of the afternoon. The day ends with a ruby sunset, best appreciated with a celebratory drink in hand. When the water is low at the end of the winter before the rainy season, the camp provides peaceful refuge for travellers and is a relaxed and favourite stopover on the way from Namibia to Botswana and Vic Falls. Glamping takes on new meaning on this African adventure, when you return from some of the best wildlife viewing to the comfort of your tented accommodation, and dine outdoors overlooking the floodplains. Quiet and birdsong lull you into grateful reverie at this natural oasis. – *Ron Swilling*

+264 (0)61 427 200. www.gondwana-collection.com, info@gondwana-collection.com



KwaZulu-Natal

6 Thanda Safari Tented Camp

Hluhluwe

Just off the N2 between the towns of Hluhluwe and Mkuze, we discovered this Big Five gem. Our field guide welcomed us at the gate of and from that moment until the end of our stay we were treated to five-star luxury in true African-safari style. We loved our tent with its private sundeck, large bathtub and outside shower, and far enough away from other tents to afford complete privacy. The camp is partially fenced to ensure guests' safety, and walking between the communal area and your tent is not permitted at night unless you are escorted by a staff member. The superb communal area has a swimming pool, boma, bar and lounge where we enjoyed meeting guests from across the world between game drives and meals. Highlights for us were the large numbers of game we saw on the morning and afternoon drives and, with knowledgeable guides tracking them for us, we ticked off four of the Big Five in no time – unfortunately the leopard remained elusive as always. – *Riaan Hattingh*

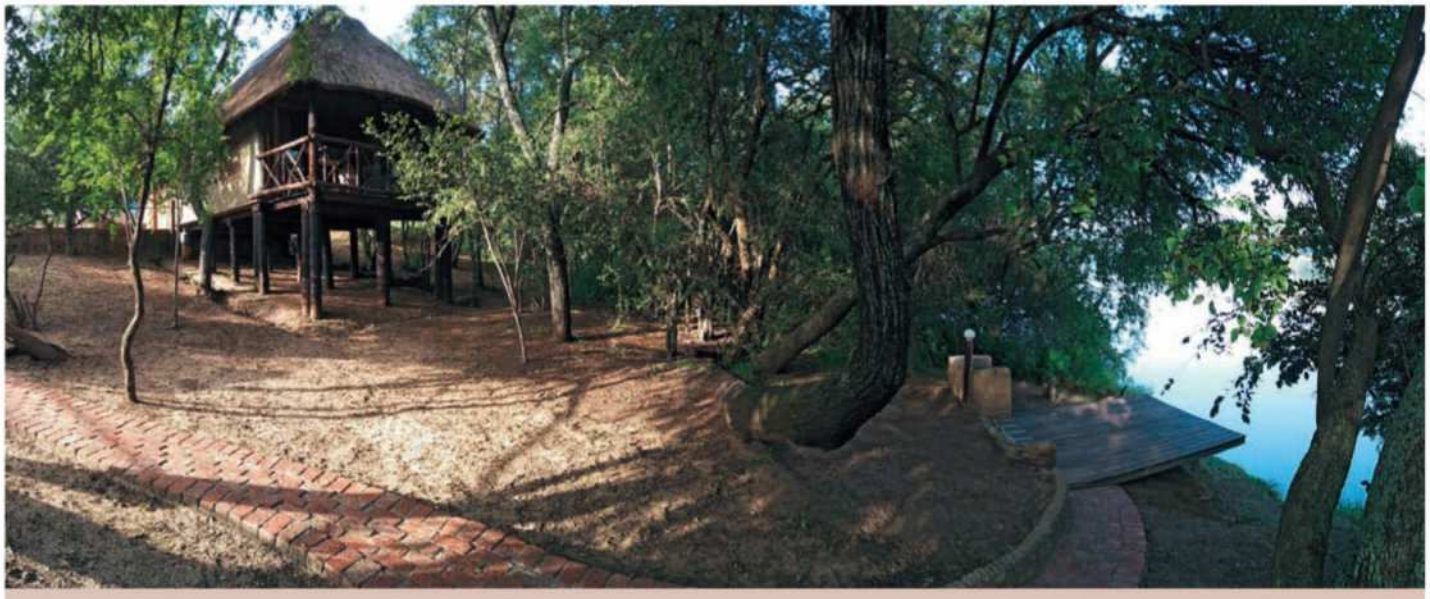
032 586 0149, reservations@thanda.co.za, www.thanda.com

Country Escapes

7 Western Cape
Sweet-thorn Eco-lodge
Gamkaberg Nature Reserve

Treat yourself to a glamping getaway at this refreshingly lovely camp. Surrounded by sweet-thorn, spekboom and the rounded hills of the Gamkaberg, this is a country escape to jot down and remember when you feel like being out in nature in your very own private camp. Surprisingly affordable, Sweet-thorn is one of four attractive eco-lodges in the Gamkaberg Nature Reserve, easily reached from the R62 between Calitzdorp and Oudtshoorn. Three safari tents, a fully equipped kitchen, a lapa to prepare a lekker braaivleis meal and a gazebo with hammocks and a comfy sofa, make this a luxurious and special camping experience, with everything you need at your fingertips. Living up to Cape Nature's 'touching the Earth lightly' credo, the camps have solar-powered plunge pools – filtered by a tiny wetland of reeds – and waterless loos, built with natural materials, make use of biodegradable cleaning agents and recycle all waste. There is something inspiring about knowing that your accommodation is a healthy addition to the planet – and that enviro-friendly tourism can be so rewarding and enjoyable. Head out on a 4x4 drive up the steep incline for breathtaking views over the Gamkaberg mountains, explore the surroundings on the hiking trails ranging from 0.7km (20 minutes) to 14.4km (6 hours), walk the labyrinth, climb the local crags and discover the variety of Klein Karoo birds. Or, just relax at the camp in your hammock. – *Ron Swilling*

www.capenature.co.za, reservation.alert@capenature.co.za
021 483 0190



8 Free State
The Dell Nature Reserve
Parys

Only ten kilometres north-west of Parys on the banks of the Vaal River, and just an hour's drive from Joburg, we booked in for a weekend break. There's a variety of accommodation, from camping to luxury chalets, on offer and we opted for the Swartwildebees tent, a fully equipped, self-catering unit with a thatch roof and canvas and brick sides. A traditional open-fire braai at sunset, with a bottle wine on our private deck looking over the river, was exactly what we needed to regain our senses. A gas braai is also available. Several trails on this 280-hectare reserve, with a number of antelope species and giraffe, allow for close-up viewing, either on foot, cycling or on game drives. A small shop has basic necessities, including fishing gear, and you can rent mountain bikes and kayaks. The Likkewaan Trail, with large sections along the river, also provided us with splendid views from higher ground. We loved the no-noise, no music/TV policy, allowing us to listen to the call of jackal at night and to fall asleep to the sounds of the river below. – *Riaan Hattingh*

072 486 9491, bookings@thedell.co.za, www.thedell.co.za

WIN Luxury Madikwe Safari

Worth R30 000

TAU GAME LODGE

Tau Game Lodge in the malaria-free Madikwe Game Reserve on the border of Botswana, is but a four and a half-hour drive from Johannesburg. The reserve is home to the Big Five, and the daily spectacle of myriad wildlife drinking at the Tau waterhole, visible from all room and communal decks, is one of many highlights.

The five-star lodge is enclosed within the reserve and guests can move around safely, enjoying a swim in one of two pools or appreciating the prolific birdlife and diverse game that roam free on the other side of the unobtrusive fence. Game drives are spectacular, with magical sunrises, which are ideal for capturing photographic memories, and dazzling African sunsets followed by the awakening of nocturnal animals in the moonlight. Dinner is a relaxed affair in the restaurant, boma or on the dining deck, depending on the weather.

The lodge has 30 rooms, from Standard to Luxury to Family Suites, as well as a spa and conference centre, making it the ideal destination for romantic, family, leisure and business stays.

Tau Game Lodge 011 466 8715/17, www.taugamelodge.co.za

THE PRIZE

- Two nights' accommodation for a couple in a Deluxe Chalet.
- Three meals are included.
- Two game drives per day.
- Excludes beverages, transport, flights, transfers, gratuities and all other extras.
- The prize is worth R30 000 and is valid until end January 2019 (subject to availability)

TO ENTER

SMS the word TAU, your email and postal address to 48402 before 30 June 2018.
Standard SMS rates apply and free SMSes do not apply.
The prize is not transferable and cannot be converted to cash.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: 1. SMS errors will be billed. **2.** Participation is free and open to anyone other than employees of Caxton Publishers, their promotional partners and printers, their advertising and promotional agencies and their immediate families. **3.** The judges' decision is final. **4.** Prizes are not transferable and cannot be converted to cash. **5.** Offer valid for SA residents only. **6.** To comply with the Consumer Protection Act, postal entries will no longer be accepted and winners will be required to supply their ID number. **7.** There is no limit to the number of entries per reader. **8.** The winner is randomly selected after the closing date of the competition. **9.** Any extra costs incurred such as transfers, beverages, telephone and laundry, conservation contribution and all additional expenses not mentioned will be for the winner's account.

The Smart Home *will Happen*

writes COLIN CULLIS. The question is, will it have smart occupants?

The last thing you want when on holiday is a call from a security company about an incident at home. Even with no call, there's still the nagging feeling that something could go wrong.

Could technology take care of that or might it have the opposite effect? Let's consider the pros and cons of the smart home. There are two reasons you might need it, and you could be surprised – despite what you initially think, keeping your home secure is a secondary requirement.

For all the times you have had to contend with a real home-security situation, count the number of times it was a false alarm or a mistake. In their alarm stats for South Africa, Fidelity, the South African home-security organisation that took over ADT in November last year, said 94 to 99 per cent of alarm activations were false alarms.

If you were to count your ten most recent alarm activations, would they also feature as many false alarms? So what then is the main reason for having an alarm? Peace of mind, but that only works if the false alarms don't irritate you and your alarm company. To do that your security needs to be easy to use and to offer you good coverage and convenience.

Convenience in the past was hard. Alarms used to be wired systems that required doors and windows to be closed for the system to be active. The next step offered passive beams to monitor areas and be active outside while you were inside, and activated in parts of the home when you went to bed.

You also probably forgot to set it or deactivate it sometimes, and woke with concern at it being on, or have crept out for a midnight snack, only to wake the household

with an ear-splitting alarm. Once children are old enough you also need to consider their movements and how often they could trigger it, or forget to re-arm it when back home.

If it were easier to manage, it would offer peace of mind with minimal false alarms, and be a powerful deterrent to house robbery and house burglary.

House burglary is the act of breaking into a home, typically to steal something, and is more common with 647 340 incidents reported at least once by a resident in 2016/2017. House robbery occurs when the occupants are involved. According to the Stats SA Victims of Crime survey, 128 206 such incidents happened in 2016/2017. Combined, it means that, of the 16 million homes in South Africa, 775 510 homes were robbed. That is an almost five per cent possibility and justifies doing something to reduce your risk.

Here are your options:

1. MONITORING Most of the cameras mounted around and inside homes can use infrared for night vision and some have microphones and speakers for picking up audio and playing sound. They connect to the internet, allowing you to monitor them remotely, and you can set them up to send you alerts when motion is detected. They will also record all the incidents for reviewing.

Smoke and gas detectors can be included in areas that may be at risk of fire or gas leaks. A water-leak monitor covers the geyser or elsewhere on the property that might spring a leak, like a pool. Electricity supply or home wiring can be checked, and alerts (alarm, SMS or app notification) sent in the event of a power failure. You can set them to send multiple alerts, or to arrange with a plumber or security company to respond automatically.

Medical monitors can also be connected to the system to summon medical help when needed.

2. ACCESS Lost or stolen keys typically mean changing the locks. New locks use either keycode access or biometric measurements like your fingerprint or face or a proximity sensor using your phone. Phone-enabled locks can be combined with monitoring to alert you to someone at your gate or door, allowing you to see and talk to them before letting them in.

By not using keys you reduce that risk, but, as with any digital system it means you still face risk from a hack. New systems are more secure, but weak passwords typically make the system as safe as their users are careful.

3. DETERRENTS Busy homes without seemingly regular routines are the least favoured

A smart home will cover more than just the security needs and, in time, will control everything.

by criminals, so home automation systems connected to the home-security system can manage lights and even sound in your home when you are away. Passive light sensors that activate near or on the perimeter of your property add to the risk of being seen and setting off an alarm should the intruders come closer. Using light as an initial deterrent rather than an alarm will work better with pets. It should also reduce the chance of a false alarm.

Sirens and emergency signals are justified when an intruder persists, and explicit notification to indicate a siren and an emergency response is itself a good deterrent. Once someone has gained access and is determined to enter, the options depend on whether you are home and if you are willing to engage.

If most theft is concerned with acquiring something of value, not engaging makes sense. A strobe light is disorientating and makes seeing difficult. Using a smoke device would add to that. However, it may affect emergency responders as much as anyone else. Some products will use substances that could be harmful and the potential risk of them activating at the wrong time suggests they should preferably be avoided.

A system using everything mentioned would be expensive at the moment and, if it worked, you would hardly use it. To get the most from this sophisticated system you would combine its functions with home automation. At the very least, your ability to arm or disarm the measures you have put in place is a must. You could also manage other elements like temperature, by having air conditioning activate to optimum levels before you return home. Similarly, you could have appliances like coffee machines, radios or TVs turn on at a set time or when you enter the room.

Besides keeping your home safe, this system would allow you to check in on pets or children. Monitoring staff at your home should only be activated if they have been made aware of the extent and reason for the monitoring, some cases may not allow for it at all.

For those who have a second property, the benefits of remote monitoring are even more significant. You could check in on the other property as needed or in the event of an alert. If both homes had such a system, you would be able to keep an eye on your primary property while you were away.

But there is a downside. The more elements of your home that could be accessed remotely, the more the system could be compromised should someone gain unauthorised access to it. Shutting it down during a robbery is the primary risk, but it may involve eavesdropping to access banking information, or capture footage to attempt blackmail.

The chances are low, but as is often the case when we use sophisticated systems, we prove to be the weak link in the chain. If you are not comfortable with a system like this, or mistakenly assume it is a replacement for a set of keys, you may find it increases your risk of trouble.

Either way, the availability of more internet-enabled devices in the home, like smart speakers that connect to smart cameras, TVs and other devices, will lead to your home becoming semi-automated without the need to install fancy systems. The smart home will happen, the question is will it have smart occupants ready to make the most of the opportunities and avoid the unnecessary risks? ■

Alfa Surprises with an SUV

STEPHEN SMITH goes for a spin in the Alfa Romeo Stelvio and loves it

I'm an unashamed Alfisti – I love Alfa Romeos and have since a 70s GTV first burbled into my field of vision before I was a teenager. Back then they were cheap as chips, but I still couldn't afford a nice one by the time I was driving. Instead I bought an Alfa Giulietta that had none of the class, but a whole lot of charm. The only downside of this 1.8-litre Italian sedan was that it was usually broken or thinking of new ways to be broken – not a good fault for your fishing vehicle to suffer from.

That was the first and last Alfa I owned, but I drove an Alfa Romeo GT for a few months back in 2007, and that was pretty close to the Alfa of my dreams. And now Alfa has gone and made an SUV.

I don't think every car manufacturer should make an SUV any more than I think every restaurant should offer sushi. I think some companies should make proper 4x4s that go places, others should make sedans and stationwagons, and others should make little hatches. In short, companies should stick to what they're good at. I know, that's the kind of thinking that'll put companies out of business quicker than an Enterprise sign on a deli door. After all, Porsche's best seller is the Cayenne, and Lexus sells more RX SUVs than any other model. SUVs continue to grow in popularity every year, even among people who have no rational reason to own one, and you can't expect Alfa not to take a stab at the market.

With all this in mind, I was apprehensive when I took delivery of the Alfa Romeo Stelvio a few weeks back. I was excited but worried that this would be another bland SUV from a company that should know better, that it might insert a few cracks in my Alfisti fervour.

There are two things that a true Alfa does extremely well – drives well and looks good. Does the Stelvio manage in these regards? Obviously it looks good. Alfa is on an upward roll at the moment, on the back of the award-winning Giulia, and the Stelvio has taken the Giulia's design and SUVed it very successfully – not an easy job. Similar lights, grille and

TOP: Design has been borrowed from the successful Alfa Giulia and well translated into SUV shape. LEFT: Red and Alfas are a delicious combination.

ABOVE: A slightly small boot is one of the Stelvio's few weaknesses.
RIGHT: Borrowed from the Giulia, the interior is a lovely place to spend time.

air scoops mark it as a modern Alfa, while the rear has adopted certain Giulia-design elements, again including the lights, although the result is not quite as elegant. Overall it does enough to stand out as one of the prettier SUVs on the road.

And as a driving instrument the Stelvio excels, from the brilliant 2-litre engine (206kW and 400Nm of torque) through the 8-speed automatic transmission to the chassis, and ultimately to the incredible handling. On tar it is as good or better than any other SUV I have driven, including BMWs and Range Rovers, but it gets even better on gravel, which is a bit of a surprise. Loads of grip from the Q4 all-wheel-drive system is beautifully complemented by suspension that copes with bumps and ruts with total aplomb. Not only has this put my worries about it being a sub-par SUV to bed, but the Stelvio has actually become my favourite road-biased SUV. I didn't try it on anything more challenging than a gravel road because I really didn't feel like dinging one of the lovely 18-inch wheels or puncturing a low-profile tyre. Hill-descent control has been added, though, to help the all-wheel-drive system with low-speed work in slippery conditions.

The uncluttered cabin, lifted almost bolt for bolt from the Giulia, is a mix of sophisticated highs (beautifully tactile, real-metal transmission paddles behind the steering wheel, for example) and the odd budget-affected low (like cheap-feeling plastics).

Stelvio features a number of sophisticated safety systems, available as standard or optional depending on the version. Key among them is the Integrated Brake System (IBS), Forward Collision Warning and Autonomous Emergency Brake with pedestrian detection, Lane Departure Warning, Blind Spot Monitoring (BSM) with Rear Cross-Path Detection and Active Cruise Control. Thanks to these systems, and others, Stelvio achieved Euro NCAP five-star rating with a 97 per cent score in the protection of adult occupants: an excellent result, considering the extremely strict assessment system introduced in 2016. At R810 000, the Alfa Romeo Stelvio is in my unbiased eyes the most charming SUV on the road, with much of Alfa's traditional strengths and apparently none of its traditional weaknesses.

Unfortunately, it is a bit more expensive than most of its rivals, and it'll be interesting to see if potential buyers can justify that price premium. The prices include a 6-year/100 000km maintenance plan and a 3-year/100 000km warranty. ■

FACT FILE

NAME: Alfa Romeo Stelvio Super
BODY TYPE: Premium compact SUV
ENGINE CAPACITY: 2.0 litre turbocharged
POWER OUTPUT: 206kW
TORQUE: 400Nm
CLAIMED FUEL CONSUMPTION: 7ℓ/100km
PRICE: R810 000

WHEELSPIN

Volvo XC40 is 2018 European Car of the Year

The new Volvo XC40 small SUV has been named the 2018 European Car of the Year, the first win of this prestigious award for Volvo Cars. This means that all of Volvo's current SUVs have received an international award, with the large XC90 and mid-size XC60 awarded the North American Truck/Utility of the Year title in the past two years. Safety and driver-assistance features on the XC40 include Volvo Cars' Pilot Assist system, City Safety, Run-off Road protection and mitigation, Cross Traffic alert with brake support and the 360° camera that helps drivers manoeuvre their car into tight parking spaces. Basically, it's hard to find anywhere safer. The XC40 will be arriving in South Africa in April. For more information keep an eye on the COUNTRY LIFE website.

Jag E-Pace lands locally

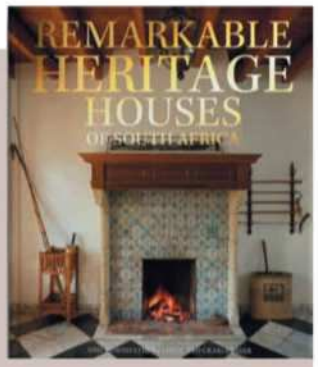
The barrage of premium SUVs continues apace, with the diminutive Jaguar E-Pace the latest to arrive on the local market. The marketing bumph is all about how the E-Pace is an SUV with all the attributes of a sportscar, while it is aimed squarely at the 'upwardly mobile' – it will keep you connected with a 10-inch touch screen, Head-up Display and Spotify all as standard. There are also up to four 12-volt charging points and five USB connections as well as a 4G Wi-Fi hotspot for up to eight devices. Another nice feature is the wearable Activity Key, which is a waterproof key that allows the driver to lock the main key inside the vehicle when enjoying outdoor pursuits such as running or cycling. All E-Paces come with all-wheel-drive and a nine-speed automatic transmission as standard, and a five-star Euro NCAP rating. Prices start at R598 500, and vehicles are already on showroom floors.

Macpherson's Elephant

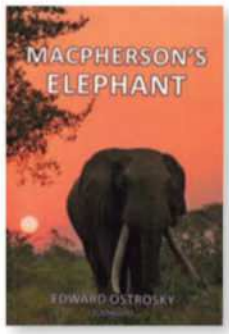
Cocooned in safari vehicles and comfortable camps, tourists rarely get a true sense of what happens behind the scenes in our national parks and game reserves. Ed Ostrosky, founding park warden of the Tembe Elephant Park on the Mozambique border, pulls aside the curtain to expose some of the more sweaty and terrifying aspects of confronting heavily-armed poachers or tracking rogue elephants maddened by festering gunshot wounds. Although it is a work of fiction, the book is based on real events and the lead character closely mirrors Ostrosky, a former US infantryman who was awarded the Purple Heart in Vietnam, before moving to Africa to become a game ranger. He would spend more than four decades in conservation, including a 17-year stint in charge of Tembe. Wounded or harassed by poachers and militia gangs during the Mozambique Civil War, some of the Tembe elephants turned quite nasty and, while his job was to protect them, Macpherson is compelled to pursue the malevolent bull that gives the book its title.
Author: Edward Ostrosky **Reviewer**: Tony Carnie **Publisher:** Reach Publishers **Distributor:** edwardostrosky.co.za, 082 334 2662 **Price:** R290 **ISBN:** 978-0-62078-275-3 **Giveaway Code:** MAC

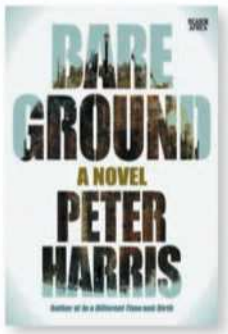
BOOK OF THE MONTH

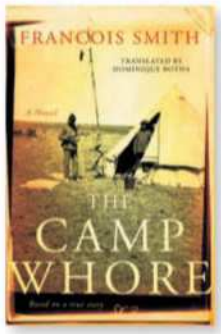
Remarkable Heritage Houses of South Africa



'A delectable glimpse into some 20 characterful lived-in houses that are usually hidden from public view', is how Nini Bairnsfather Cloete describes her book, stipulating that they have been chosen for their heritage (not historic) value and that they have been built no later than the middle of the last century. They have also been chosen for 'the way in which their interiors have evolved, or been dressed beyond the reach of fashion'. So what you have between the covers of this visually magnanimous book is a wealth of classic and informed decor inspiration, as well as insights by the author on the provenance of every home and its owners. You may not have the fine architectural structures that most of these homes are blessed with, and you may not be able to aspire financially to the finished looks in these glossy images, but you will be able to soak up style in spades and apply it in whatever way you can to your own would-be remarkable house.
Author: Nini Bairnsfather Cloete **Photographs:** Craig Fraser **Reviewer:** Nancy Richards **Publisher:** Quivertree **Price:** R600 **ISBN:** 978 1 92820-962-1 **Giveaway Code:** HOUSES







Bare Ground

Fact may well be stranger than fiction, but convincing fiction inevitably takes its lead from fact. And in *Bare Ground*, Peter Harris has clearly been keeping his ear to, well, the underground. The book is set in present-day Johannesburg, 'a city built on gold and still somewhat proudly flaunting its mining-town mentality'. Deeply entrenched in the world of pits is the enigmatic Max Sinclair – 'nearly sixty…with eyes (that) looked not so much at you as through you' – head of Wits Mining with a mandate from the board to sell a share to black consortium. So the stage is set for a cast of well-observed contemporary characters each with their own 'stuff' – Musa Madondo, ex-human-rights lawyer with a taste for the good things in life; good-guy geologist Sifiso Lesibe; scared-for-his-safety Walter Berryman; Max's wife Julia, a sort of moral compass; his mother, who carries a dark secret and reads only Dickens. The title, 'bare ground' refers to all that there is to show for the massive amounts of money that changed hands for dodgy construction tenders. But like deposits in a rock face, the book offers other, more tender nuggets of interest beyond the dirty dealings of collusion, corruption, greed, power and politics.
Author: Peter Harris **Reviewer:** Nancy Richards **Publisher:** PanMacmillan **Price:** R224 **ISBN:** 978-1-77010-581-2 **Giveaway Code:** BARE

The Camp Whore

Over the ages, the ravages of war appear to be inflicted mainly on men in uniform – but let it not be underestimated how much women suffer. This book reveals a prime, complex example. Susan Nell is a psychiatric nurse when we meet her. It's World War I and she is working with those suffering from shell shock. But 16 years earlier, during the Anglo-Boer War, Susan had been raped, and had been rescued after her ordeal and nurtured back to health by a Sotho couple living in a cave. The two stories run concurrently in the book, that of the adult nurse and that of the traumatised girl, and the impact of one on the other. Francois Smith is a lecturer in literature and creative writing at the University of the Free State. He came across the true story of Susan Nell as told by novelist Nico Moolman in The Boer Whore. But Smith's book, originally written in Afrikaans, takes a more introspective look at Nell's life. It is a deep and sensitive read, equally sensitively translated by writer Dominic Botha.
Author: Francois Smith **Reviewer:** Nancy Richards **Publisher:** Tafelberg **ISBN:** 978-0-62408-276-7 **Price:** R260 **Giveaway Code:** CAMP

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Author Interview

Musa Ngqungwana might be young but is talented and wise enough to reflect on a life that has burst from poverty and hardship into song and success

WORDS NANCY RICHARDS PICTURES SUPPLIED

"I didn't like criticism, I would take it personally – only later did I realise they were trying to help. Now I'm in a place where I can take it and say thank you I'll consider that."

But criticism may have been one of the easier things Musa has had to take in his life. Poverty and rejection have been tougher visitors. 'I know going to sleep without food,' he says in his book, 'what it's like to grow up with deprivation and depravity'.

Sitting across a table from this vital, eloquent, finely tuned young man at the Mount Nelson, it's hard to imagine him as a rough and hungry kid on the streets of Port Elizabeth's Zwide township. Where he'd still be if it weren't for steely determination, a helluva voice and his grandmother.

"I was an angry child. By the end of school, I could count on one hand how many times I'd seen my father – and I was hostile to any male authority." So rejection began with an absent parent – but he's known it often since. He laughs as he recalls the first 'professional put-down'. He and some friends had formed the acapella group, Ultimate. Boldly, they entered the Shell Road to Fame competition at the Feather Market in PE.

"To our horror, embarrassment and anger, they cut us off after twenty seconds. We did not know [then] about the time limit… our exit was a walk of shame." He shakes his head. "But it taught me never to expect anything, that in show biz others like you are a dime a dozen. We never got to impress the girls as we'd hoped – plus we had no money for bus fare, so we had to walk all the way home."

But his own road to musical fame was marked. A history of school and church choir hopping, starting up and singing in acapella groups and a nerdy approach to study saw him do well and eventually make it into the Port Elizabeth Technikon and its prestigious choir. Later his gift was spotted by Shakes Sampule and Makhaya Msizi of the Viola Men's Chorus, which was to be a turning point.

"My US publicist [previously, Musa self-published his book], Katlyn Moharan said there were too many names, so I had to leave some out," he sighs. But along his path have been many music angels, including Professor Virginia Davids of the University of Cape Town's SA College of Music where he studied, and conductor Kamal Kahn who was instrumental in getting him into the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia, where he learnt about rejection big time. "In two years of auditions I didn't get one call back." And with finance a constant worry, our hero bass-baritone began to understand the high demands of the opera world.

It remains a precarious and lonely business that's taken its toll on his personal and family life. "Worst was when no one from my family came to my graduation." But through so many more music angels and role models, his metal has been polished and it glows. His long and impressive list of awards and performances includes Standard Bank Young Artist 2015, title role in *Porgy and Bess,* and his favourite role "Leporello in *Don Giovanni*. My first major role, although it was on opening night that I learned my grandmother had died."

At time of going to print he will have just played Queequeg in *Moby Dick* in Pittsburgh, but it was while researching the part of Stephen Kumalo in *Lost in the Stars*, a musical adaptation of Alan Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country*, that he was inspired to write his second book. "The working title is *Diliza Sabe, Conflicted Warrior*, about a boy who grows up in the Eastern Cape and goes into exile." The character Diliza, meaning destruct, is informed by many individuals, not least Musa's uncles, whom he recalls visiting on Robben Island as a child. To hear him talk about his book, it feels as if writing could almost usurp his singing. But later, when he delivers a few notes to demonstrate the danger of doubling consonants in Italian, I realise that across the table is not just a township boy turned world-class opera singer, but a repository of glorious sound. ■

***Odyssey of an African Opera Singer* is published by Penguin (R250)**
www.penguinrandomhouse.co.za

GIVEAWAYS

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Cucina Labia 021 788 6068

On this part of the False Bay coast, the Muizenberg shoreline, one can almost feel the ghosts of the wealthy people of the past. They include Cecil John Rhodes, the Lindberghs who founded CNA, Abe Bailey, whose grave site is half way up the mountain and, of course, Count Natale Labia who was at one time the Italian ambassador to South Africa.

The mansion which is Casa Labia is packed with Italian antiques and paintings. One could so easily be in one of those palazzi in Venice, until you look out the window and find yourself staring at the ocean just across the railway line that snakes along the Main Road. You can eat inside if you like things more formal or if the weather is playing up, or outside on the veranda which is just the spot to unwind in great style. Beryl, who loves all things Italian, especially Bulgari and Ferrari (that woman has a one track mind) "adores taking lunch al fresco, caro" so that is where we sat.

The kitchen is under the sure hand of Monché Muller, who cleverly does not make the menu exclusively Italian but freewheels through ingredients like sumac and tofu with the ease born of time she spent at The Test Kitchen in town. Beryl, nevertheless, started with Rollatini – succulent pork rolls with grilled artichoke, pine-nut chimichurri, olives, capers and slow-dried tomatoes (R95), which she declared a tangy triumph of textures and flavours – "Bellissime!" I had the cherry-smoked duck liver and hanepoot parfait (R125) which is served with date and onion marmalade and almond stuffed prunes, intensely delicious and superb with their excellent bread, nice and crunchy.

We followed with superb osso buco (R180) with gremolata mousse (such a clever idea), smoked tomato risotto, and bone marrow jus, very stick-to-your-ribs fare on a cool Cape day. Beryl insisted on paying homage to the sea with the fish of the day (R170), kabeljou, beautifully done with Malay-spiced seafood crust, apricot, and sweet potato – a knockout. She oohed and aahed alarmingly. We shared an affogato (R80) – hazelnut and cherry cassata with orange – to finish with.

Service is professional, the wine list well chosen and the setting unbeatable. Open Tuesday to Friday 10h00 to 16h00 (Friday also until 22h00, Saturday to Sunday 09h00 to 16h00.

Empire Cafe 021 788 1250

This has been a Muizenberg institution for the last 15 years and is still avidly embraced by the locals. It is tucked away right next to where all the surfers gather to indulge their passion. Up a winding circular staircase one can watch the comings and goings as the surfers park their cars and get ready for the big wave. A surfboard attached to the ceiling downstairs shows where the Empire's heart lies. Beryl was entranced by all of this.

Very much a family place, the breakfast menu is vast and features more than a dozen ways to enjoy eggs. They range from chilli mince with beans, to poached eggs on butternut rösti with bacon, from Camembert with hot chilli jam on an Empire almond croissant to Bolognaise on brown toast – all spectacular and all served on bread and croissants which they bake themselves. These dishes are priced from R53 to R90, depending on the topping.

We resisted the temptation to indulge in one of these while we had a sensible glass or two of the Dewetshof Finesse Chardonnay, which we had brought along. The wine list is small but adequate and corkage is R35. Lunch brought things like delicious charred tomato soup (R52), nice and smoky, and smoked salmon salad (R77) with capers, orange wedges and crunchy lettuce, both great at sharpening the old tastebuds, which were quite on edge with all the yummy breakfast things coming out of the kitchen (and served all day).

We went on to superb linguini with fat mussels done in cream, white wine and plenty of garlic (R95). Beryl does not trust a restaurant where she cannot smell garlic cooking. Probably comes from all those years she spent on yachts in Greece. I had penne (also R95) smothered in a rich cream sauce packed with bacon crispy bits and peas, which was polished off in a trice, satisfying beyond all the speaking of it. We finished up by sharing a small slice of no bake cheesecake with a piquant orange topping (R20) – just enough to settle things – and left there glowing with contentment.

Open daily from 07h00 to 16h00. ■

WINEMAKER Andries Burger of Paul Cluver Estate

"There is a very special part of the Cape where one incongruously finds a valley on top of a plateau, one that is packed with apple trees and superb vineyards. This is Elgin and some of the very best of our country's wines come from here. The cool-climate terroir of this area adds immeasurably to the quality of the local fruit, while lower-lying areas are subject to the fierce Cape summers. The original farm, De Rust, has been in the Cluver family since 1896, but Paul Cluver senior, a neurosurgeon then, had the vision to plant vines in 1987 on what at the time seemed inhospitable land. Today the estate is a hive of activity, very much family run, with talented winemaker Andries Burger married to one of the Cluver daughters. To say that the wine that Andries, a member of the prestigious Cape Winemaker's Guild, makes is spectacular would be an understatement. His Rieslings are superb, the Gewürztraminer a revelation, and the Chardonnays some of the finest the country has to offer. The climate certainly plays ball with the white fruit, giving it all it needs to bring out the very best it can do. His brilliant Pinot Noirs are the only foray into red territory. Packed with apricot tang and intense botrytis flavours, the Noble Late Harvest is only released when the grapes are perfect. A masterpiece.

Gewürztraminer 2016

Typical rose petals on the nose lead to a wine packed with delicious fruity intensity with Turkish delight nuances and semi-dry citrus finish. Superb at **R100**

Crystalline Chardonnay 2017

Crystal clear as the name implies. Unoaked, no meddling with a noble grape at its best. Will convert Chardonnay naysayers in droves. **R65**

Windswept Sauvignon Blanc 2017

From high-placed and windswept vineyards – superbly clean and crisp with well-controlled acids that won't strip your palate. **R65**

A revelation on its own and perfect with light Malay curries

A boon to creamy pasta dishes

Serve cool with light fish dishes and pastas

PAUL CLUVER ESTATE, ELGIN 021 844 0605

"My aim is to make wines that are distinctly Elgin, wines which are balanced, expressive not only of variety but of where they have grown

There are wine estates where the winemakers come and go at an alarming rate. Not so at Paul Cluver, as Andries has been there for more than 23 years. This has enabled him to see himself as a custodian of the vineyards which he is passionate about. He has seen more than twenty seasons pass with all the magnificence that Mother Nature brings to the equation of winemaking. He pays tribute to his vineyard manager Rudi Zandberg, saying they spend a lot of time together making decisions about the land. Time spent working in Burgundy and with the late Paul Pontallier at Château Margaux in Bordeaux obviously had a big influence on the way he makes wine. But as he says, "My aim is to make wines that are distinctly Elgin, wines which are balanced, expressive not only of variety but of where they have grown." He talks of the vines as living, which of course they are, and his feel for the land on which he works is palpable. Andries has travelled extensively and makes a point of returning to Burgundy at least every two years – which shows in the wines he makes. He and his wife Inge live on the estate, part of the close-knit Cluver family, and are parents of two teenagers.

Read more of Greg Landman's food and wine stories

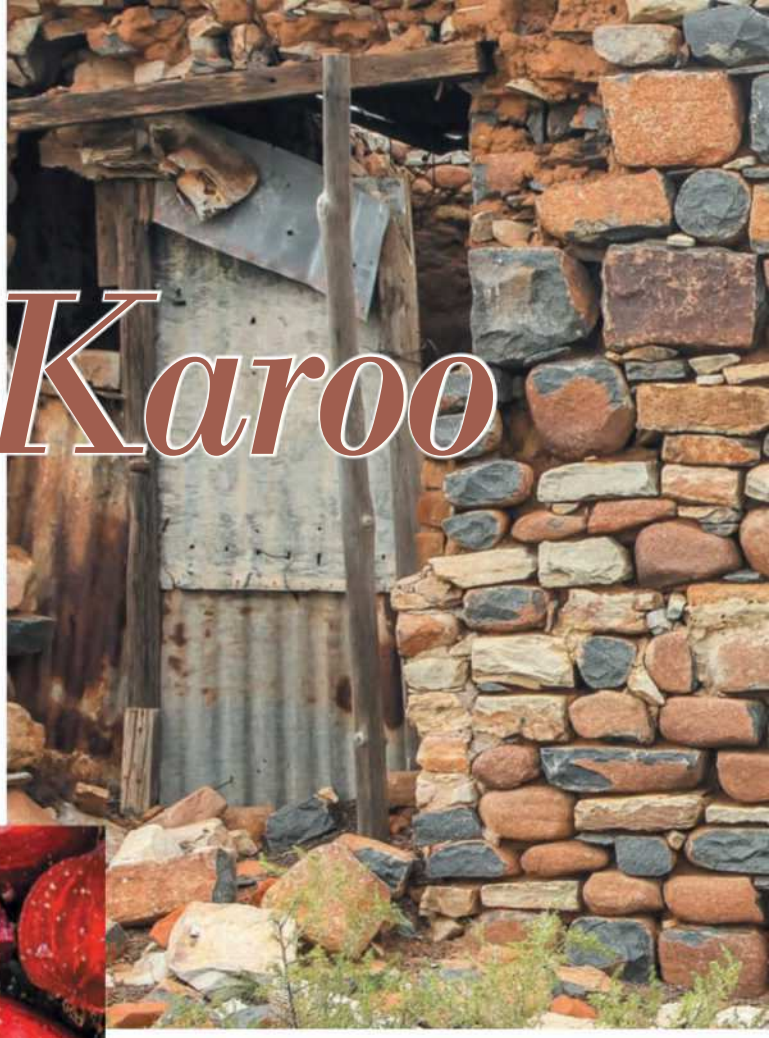
Go to www.countrylife.co.za

Middle Eastern Karoo

Adrienne Southey is a farm-based classically trained chef with an international take on the best of Heartland food

WORDS JULIENNE DU TOIT PICTURES CHRIS MARAIS

WWW.KAROOSPACE.CO.ZA



ABOVE: Adrienne prefers quartering beetroots and leaving skin and 'tails' or roots on, making them easier to peel afterwards. BELOW: Hillston Farm, where Adrienne was raised, is a working Angora goat and sheep farm. RIGHT: Adrienne adds fresh, ribbon-cut courgettes sprinkled with onion seeds to the fritters.

When Adrienne Southey was a tot growing up on Hillston Farm between Middelburg and Steynsburg in the Eastern Cape Karoo, she used to have a play-play restaurant under the pepper trees.

She arranged chairs around an old wooden table and invented starters, mains and desserts for her dollies, teddies and somewhat less than willing siblings.

Now here we are with Adrienne decades later, sitting on garden chairs at the very same table, under the old pepper trees around the homestead, photographing and devouring her courgette fritters. And we are far happier to partake than her childhood teddies ever were.

Adrienne has just returned from catering for 140 well-satisfied guests at a wedding on a nearby farm. If she's not cooking or taking pictures – usually of food or Karoo landscapes – she's sketching in ink or pencil, or shooting videos for weddings.

"And creating meals for visitors," she tells me. "Or plotting how to restore derelict farm buildings here and do them up as guest accommodation." She did this with an abandoned old house called Northmead, five gates and two valleys away. "They used it as a set for a movie called *Stuur Groete aan Mannetjies Roux*," says Adrienne. "With the money I earned from catering for the film crew I bought a set of fantastic cooking pots."

Adrienne's childhood dreams of working in a restaurant have been fulfilled several times over. "I'm happy just as long as I'm doing something creative," she says. She was classically trained at Silwood Kitchen in Cape Town and then employed by restaurants like La Colombe, the Old Mutual Executive Kitchen and Ellerman House. She also explored food-product development for Pick 'n Pay and was a food stylist for a major woman's magazine.

"I think the reason I love cooking is that it involves both art and science. So you can make it as complicated or simple as you want. Plus it's the only industry that involves all five senses."

It was, however, her world travels and exposure to the culinary secrets of foreign kitchens that brought her back to the Karoo with a fascination for Moroccan, Italian, Mediterranean and Indian influences.

"I love spices and the clean, simple flavours of the Middle East," she tells me. "I spent some time in a deli in Abu Dhabi, surrounded by 80 varieties of cheeses, whole truffles, dozens of olive oils, every kind of delicious food. My job was to show customers how to cook with all of this.

"Before that, I stayed with a foodie family in India, who introduced me to all those exotic tastes, but it is the honesty of Middle Eastern and North African foods that I love, partly because they meld so well with Karoo kos. Also, like us, the people there eat a lot of lamb."

Just then the aroma of Moroccan lamb-neck tagine wafts out of the farm kitchen, redolent with cumin, coriander, paprika, ginger and cinnamon. "Sometimes I use those same spices

TOP: Chef Adrienne Southey also has a passion for restoration, but this old shepherd's hut may have passed the point of no return. TOP RIGHT: On Hillston Farm, the tractor comes home to its shed at the end of day. ABOVE RIGHT: It's the little things that deepen flavours, like thyme or Italian herbs along with seasoning and olive oil.

ABOVE: Adrienne prepares Kisra bread in the Northmead farmhouse kitchen she restored and decorated.

rubbed all over a leg of lamb instead of the usual rosemary and garlic. I generally keep spices in the freezer to retain their flavour. My all-time favourites are cumin and coriander, fortunately easy to find in local shops.

"Middle Eastern cuisine also involves chickpeas, lentils and other legumes that last well in the storeroom. All this suits the 'Boer maak 'n plan' innovations you have to come up with when living in a comparatively remote place like a Karoo farm. "In fact, I'm probably at my most creative when I have some kind of restriction, like a limited number of ingredients. It's a bit odd. When I'm boxed in, I tend to think out of the box more."

Vegetables are a major part of Middle Eastern cuisine, but are not always an easy proposition in the Karoo because of extreme weather and long distances for transportation. "But radishes are really easy to grow and toss into a salad with cucumber, tomatoes and onions."

Over our lunch of the lamb, and a delicious Moroccan bread called Kisra, flavoured with aniseed, Adrienne explains how, for all her trotting about the globe and tasting exotic foods, it wasn't all Eat, Play, Love.

"After India, a long illness left me temporarily intolerant of all kinds of foods, including sugar, dairy and gluten. Initially it was really difficult because I love baking and I adore bread. But it spurred me on to explore other 'flours' made from coconut, almonds, chickpeas, potatoes and rice, and I discovered an alternative world of vegan and vegetarian cooking. I got into plant proteins like chia, hemp seeds and various nuts, long before they became trendy.

"I'm better now, but I became rather fond of the different flavours. I still prefer chickpea flour for things like pancakes. Rice flour adds a great snap-crackle-pop crispiness to batters. And potato flour thickens stews like cornflour does, but it tastes so much better."

Adrienne has a slight obsession with keeping up with the latest trends, "even if it is in a slow Karoo kind of way". When the world went through a spasm of fascination for molecular gastronomy, Adrienne did too, although it was truly impractical for the platteland because of the exotic ingredients like agar-agar, and strange implements.

"But I ordered a kit online and started experimenting. It really took me back to my childhood when I used to cook with my grandfather, viticulture scientist Dr Danie Joubert in Rawsonville. I remember being only eight years old and sitting in the kitchen of his house planning a dish using a recipe book. Instead of the usual measuring cups, he had test tubes and pipettes. It was a bit crazy but I suppose that's why I've retained a fascination for the scientific side of cooking."

Then there's Auntie Chrisna. "Because of my culinary interests, my mom's sister has always made a point of taking me to restaurants with the best chefs, and to food and wine pairings. I was amazed at how beautifully a Shiraz complements chocolate or a cinnamon-rich dessert."

As we say our farewells, Adrienne blurts out, "You never had any pears!" Well, no, we hadn't. She dashes off and returns with a takeaway serving of her roasted cinnamon pear and chocolate Pavlova, which should by rights be served as one's first dish on entering Heaven.

We only get as far as the farm gate before diving into the exquisite pudding in blissful silence. As we devour it, we watch a family of ground squirrels fossick among the Karoo bossies, one of them gazing back at us with envy. ■

Map reference E5 see inside back cover

Adrienne Southey adsouthey@gmail.com
www.hillstonfarm.co.za

Recipes supplied and approved by chefs

For more of Chef Adrienne Southey's recipes

Go to www.countrylife.co.za

Courgette Fritters
(Recipe on page 100)

Red Lentil and Carrot Soup

Courgette Fritters

Makes 24 canapé size fritters

- 325g self-raising flour
- 2 tbsp castor sugar
- a pinch of salt
- 180g butter
- 310mℓ buttermilk
- 1 egg, beaten
- 4 courgettes, grated
- ½ small onion, grated or chopped finely

Toppings

- cream cheese
- courgette ribbons
- feta
- black onion seeds

METHOD

Combine self-raising flour, castor sugar and salt. Rub in butter. Make a well in the centre and add buttermilk and egg. Stir till just combined. Add courgettes and onion and stir till just combined. Do not over mix. Drop spoonfuls of batter onto a heated pan smeared with oil. Once just browned, turn once.Top with cream cheese, courgette ribbons, feta and black onion seeds.

Wine Suggestion *Diemersdal Sauvignon Blanc*

Red Lentil and Carrot Soup

Serves 6

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 medium onion
- 3 garlic cloves, chopped
- 5 medium carrots, peeled and chopped
- 5 medium tomatoes
- 2 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp coriander
- 1 tsp paprika
- ¼ tsp cinnamon
- 2 cups red lentils, rinsed
- 6 cups vegetable or chicken stock
- salt and pepper

METHOD

Heat oil in a large pot over medium heat. Sauté onion and garlic until soft, then add spices and sauté until they just begin to release their magical aroma. Add carrots and sauté another minute. Add stock, tomatoes, lentils, salt and pepper. Simmer on low heat for 20 minutes or until lentils are soft. Check seasoning. You can serve the soup chunky as is or pureéd. Serve with fresh coriander, cream and a sprinkle of paprika or roasted carrots.

Wine Suggestion *Springfield Wild Yeast Chardonnay*

Venison Pies

Adrienne's Shakshukra
(Recipe on page 102)

"But it is the honesty of Middle Eastern and North African foods that I love, partly because they meld so well with Karoo kos. Also, like us, the people there eat a lot of lamb

Venison Pies

Makes 12 pies

Filling

- 2kg venison with bone (any cut will do e.g. ribs, saddle, leg) cut into smaller pieces
- 30mℓ oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 5 whole cloves of garlic
- 5mℓ ground coriander
- 5 whole black peppercorns
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 handful parsley
- 500mℓ venison or beef stock
- 30mℓ vinegar
- 1kg venison, cubed

Pastry

- 2 cups warm water
- 1 tbsp yeast
- 2 tsp salt
- 5 cups flour
- 4 tbsp olive oil

METHOD

Heat oil and brown venison. Remove from pan. Add onion and garlic. Sauté gently. Add spices. Sauté for a minute. Add venison, stock and vinegar. Cover and simmer gently until the meat falls off the bone. Allow to cool. Remove bone and shred meat. For the pastry, mix warm water and yeast and let sit 10 minutes until yeast proofs. Add 2½ cups flour with proofed yeast and mix well. Add additional 2½ cups flour and salt, knead until smooth. Cover bowl with plastic wrap. Let dough rest in a ball for 10-20 minutes. Preheat oven to 200°C. Roll out balls of dough about the size of a snooker ball. Spoon a large spoonful of venison filling onto the centre of the dough. Fold the sides of the dough up to form a triangle pinching the edges closed, but be sure to leave a hole in the centre for hot air to escape. Bake in a hot oven for approximately 20 minutes until golden. Brush with oil as they come out the oven.

Wine Suggestion: *Boekenhoutskloof Cabernet*

Roast Veg Flat Bread

Adrienne's Shakshukra

Serves 3-4

- 4 cups sweet potato, peeled and cubed
- 4 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tbsp butter
- 3 sprigs fresh thyme
- salt and pepper
- 1 red onion, sliced
- slices back bacon, chopped roughly
- 1 cup fresh cream
- 6 eggs

METHOD

Place sweet potato in an oven roasting dish. Dot with butter and drizzle with 2 tablespoons olive oil. Scatter thyme and season with salt and pepper. Cover with foil and roast for 30 minutes at 180°C. Uncover and roast for a further hour or until just golden. Fry onion in the remainder of the olive oil until translucent. Add bacon and fry till just golden. Add sweet potato and cream. Heat through. Season with salt and pepper. Make 6 slight indentations among sweet potato cubes and crack an egg in each. Cook for 3 minutes. Place in oven for a further 3 minutes or until they're done to your liking. Garnish with fresh thyme sprigs.

Roast Veg Flat Bread

Makes 2 medium flat breads

Toppings

- 1 butternut, sliced into wedges
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- salt and pepper
- 2 tsp dried Italian herbs or 4 tsp fresh herbs
- 1 onion, sliced
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 4 whole beetroot, halved, keep skin on
- 2 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- salt and pepper

Bread

- 2 cups warm water
- 1 tbsp yeast
- 5 cups flour
- 2 tsp salt
- 4 tbsp olive oil
- ½ cup caramelised onions
- ¼ cup feta

METHOD

Arrange butternut in roasting dish. Toss with 2 tablespoons olive oil. Season with salt, pepper and mixed Italian herbs. Scatter onion and garlic over the butternut. Cover with foil and roast for 30 min at 180°C. Remove foil and roast for a further 45 minutes until just golden. Place beetroot halves in roasting dish. Toss with 2 tablespoons of balsamic vinegar and olive oil. Season with salt and pepper. Cover

Roast Pear Chocolate Pavlova

with foil. Roast for 2 hours or until tender, at 180°C. Remove skin. Slice into wedges. To make the flat bread, mix warm water and yeast and rest for 10 minutes until yeast proofs. Add 2½ cups flour with proofed yeast and mix well. Add additional 2½ cups flour and salt, knead until smooth. Cover bowl with plastic wrap. Let dough rest in a ball for 10-20 minutes. Preheat oven to 200°C. Divide dough into two balls. Roll out to about 1cm thick. Spread with caramelised onion. Top with butternut and beetroot. Sprinkle with feta. Bake for about 20 minutes until golden and cooked through.

Roast Pear Chocolate Pavlova

Serves 4-6

Meringue

- 4-5 egg whites (weighing 150g)
- 300g castor sugar
- pinch of salt
- 2 tbsp cocoa
- 1 tsp cinnamon

Pears

- 4 pears cut in half lengthways
- 2 tbsp honey
- 5 star anise
- 5 cloves
- 2 cinnamon sticks

Cream

- 1 cup cream
- 2mℓ vanilla essence
- 2 tbsp icing sugar

METHOD

For the meringue, preheat oven to 110°C and line a large baking sheet with a non-stick baking sheet or tinfoil sprayed with Spray & Cook. Whisk egg whites with salt until stiff peaks form. Gradually add the castor sugar, whisking continuously until all the sugar is added. Tip cocoa and cinnamon onto meringue and fold through gently with a metal spoon to create a marbled effect. Spoon onto prepared baking sheet in a rough disc with an indentation in the middle. Bake for 1½-1¾ hours or until dry and crisp. Remove from the oven and cool on the baking sheet.

To make the pears, preheat oven to 200°C. Arrange the pears cut side up in a roasting dish. Drizzle with honey and scatter spices over pears. Roast for approximately 20 minutes or until just browned and slightly softened, but not completely soft that they lose their shape. Remove from oven and allow to cool.

For the cream, whisk all the cream ingredients till soft peaks form. Spoon cream onto cooled meringue and top with cooled pears.

Wine Suggestion *Simonsig Pinot Noir Rosé MCC* or *Franschoek Cellar Baker Station Shiraz* – this wine is incredible with any cinnamon flavoured dessert. Try it with milk tart. ■

Worcester, Bastiaans Kloof / R19.5 million

3 Bedrooms / 3 Bathrooms / This 1 131 hectare private nature reserve is situated in the picturesque mountain pass of Bainskloof, one and a half hour's drive from Cape Town. Bastiaans Kloof has a magnificent villa and 3 gorgeous self-catering cottages, presenting access to spectacular mountain hikes and trails, a perennial river with waterfalls and natural pools.

Gerrit Mostert 083 293 1274 / gerrit.mostert@pamgolding.co.za

Income-producing, well-established business is for immediate sale

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The lodge is currently generating a healthy turnover. Overheads are low and annual financial statements to February 2018 are available. Clientele includes national and international tourists, passing travellers on the N7 and contractors and government employees working in the region. The spring flower season is a major drawcard for tourists. This business would ideally suit an active couple looking to live in a peaceful environment and self-manage a small but growing tourism facility.

The property and infrastructure is in very good condition and has room for expansion.

R3 million negotiable including property and all lodge assets and equipment.

Interested parties should contact Guy Baxter on 082 653 8669 or email baxter@iafrica.com for more information

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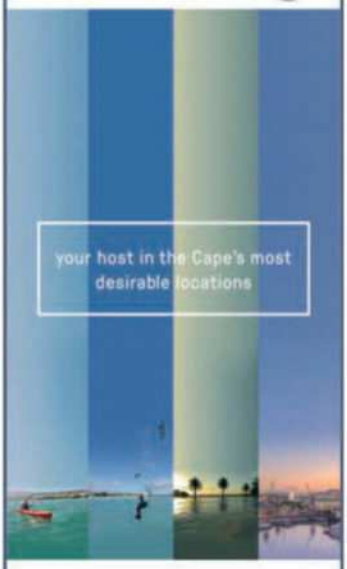

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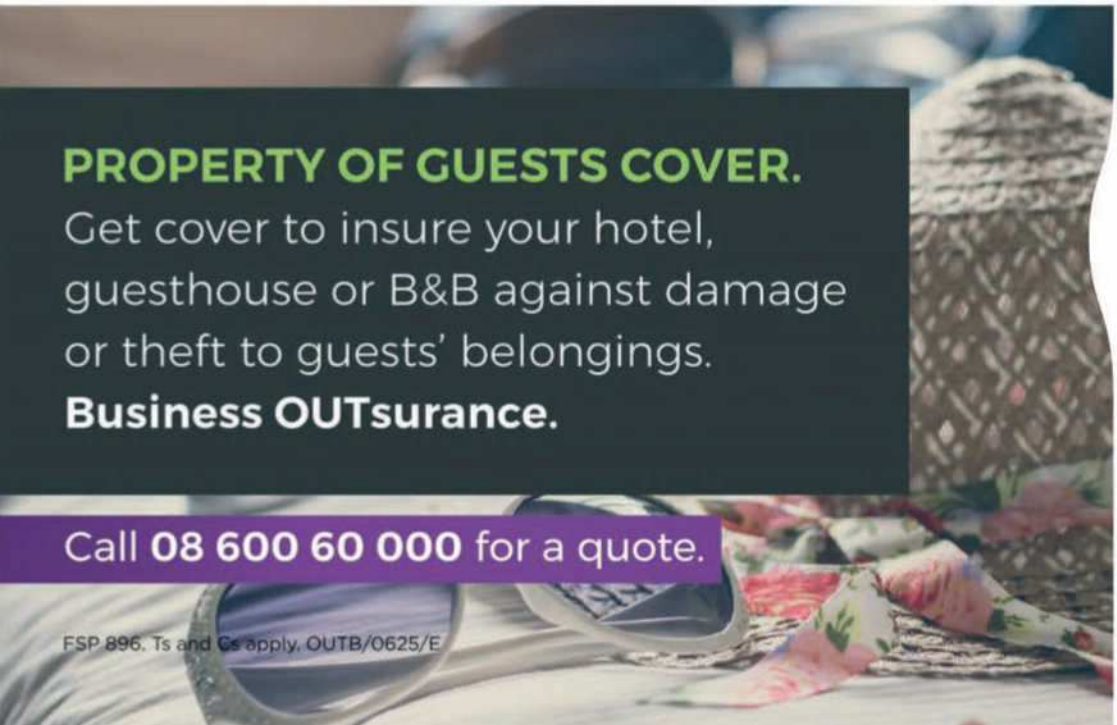

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Parting Shot

So why exactly does OBIE OBERHOLZER have such a thing for that iconically kitsch trio of ornamental ducks?

I was tortured as a baby. My mother, born German and a strict disciplinarian, indoctrinated me from birth that there was nothing to laugh about in life. That's the funny part of my beginnings as a human being. But, I lie. I lie because, after being in the world for a mere three months, I realised that humour was the spice of life. My parents were incredible. The only real thing that still worries me are ducks.

You see, when I was this gurgling, snotty-nosed baby, my mother suspended three Donald Ducks across my cot. When I was told to go to 'sleeeepies', all I could view from my cot angle was the white ceiling boards and the three ducks. Walt Disney created Donald Duck anthropomorphic in 1934. My mother didn't know what anthropomorphic meant in English so she never told me. I think it means an animal with human characteristics. So, ever since I was a child, I have had these three ducks flying around and around, back and forth, in my head.

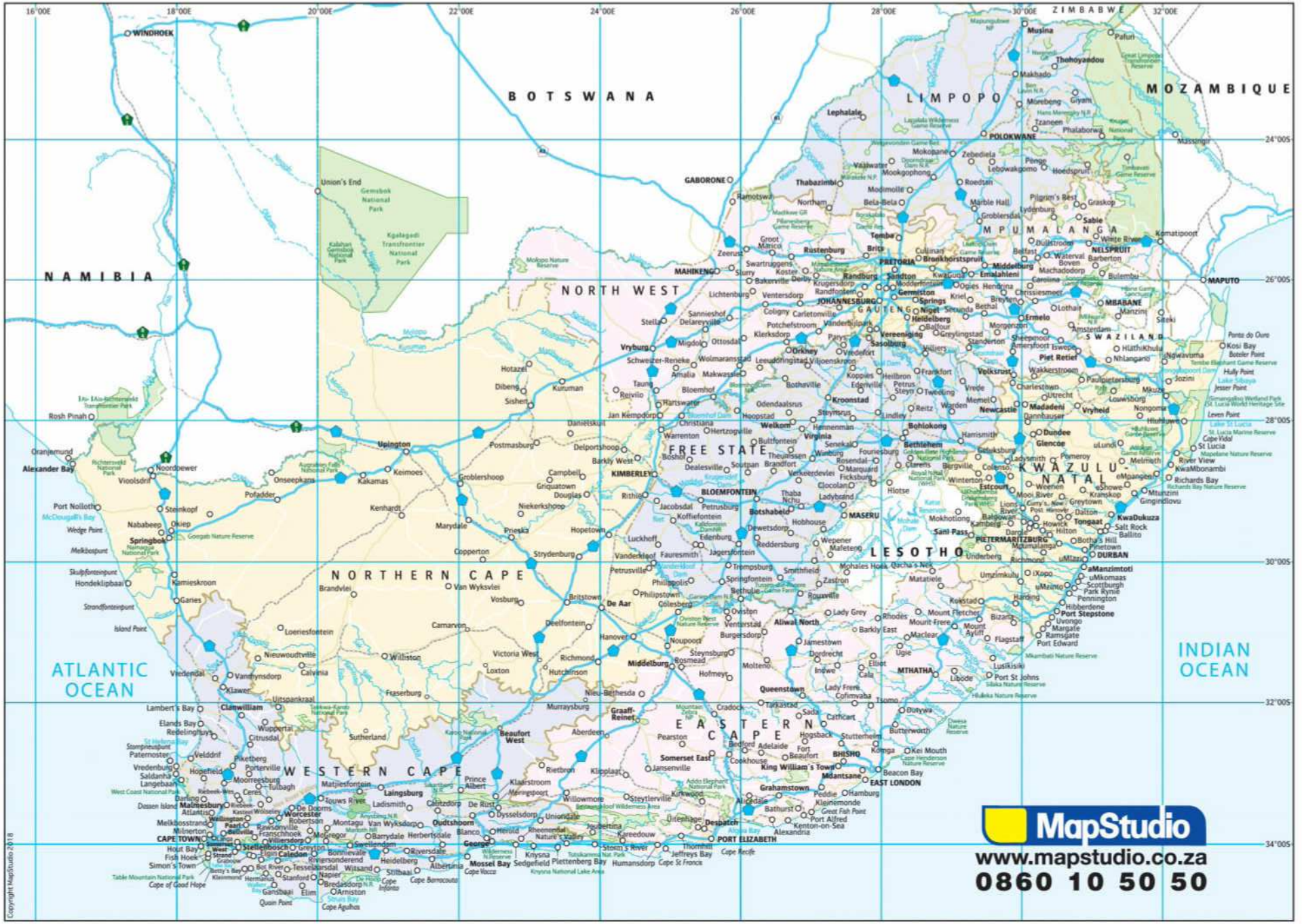
The duck problem started, as many other problems did, in God's own county – Staffordshire, England. In a ceramic factory in Stoke-on-Trent, 11 years before my birth, the first mallard duck figurines were made. *Anas platyrhynchos* or wild ducks are found worldwide. The males have green heads. These three flying ducks have migrated in flocks to entrance, living and kitchen walls around the globe.

As a lover of South African kitsch, I have been trying for almost 60 years to saturate my appetite for these ornamental ducks. The original ducks also can be found now made of wood, plastic, wallpaper, or from acrylic cutouts, embroidery art, and as an assortment of mobiles. I have travelled the back roads, gravel roads, and far roads of South Africa to shoot the ducks and photograph the people who hang them on their walls. I have found them in houses as far away as Soebatsfontein, Bamboesbaai, Riemvasmaak, Platbakkies and Compensation Station.

My dream is to one day buy an old country inn and call it Duck Inn. Each room will have a set of flying ducks but, being slightly alternative, the small duck will fly in front of the larger ducks. The passages, dining room and bar will be plastered with ducks. The staff will all be dressed as ducks. They will wear white-feathered overalls with green caps and yellow shoes and socks. Each time that they serve you a drink they will go 'Quack-Quack'. We will start the annual Duck Festival and, among all the ducking, diving and waddling, we will select Mr and Miss Duck.

This image of three brass ducks in a basket I found in the Eastern Cape's Wartrail Valley. ■

www.obieoberholzer.net



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