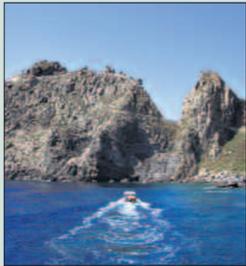


# WEEKEND TRAVEL & FOOD JOURNAL

SATURDAY-SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11-12 2008

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**DONKEY POWER:** Gerrie Theron, one of three drivers, with his four-legged crew on the new Cederberg Heritage Route, an ecotourism organisation that directly benefits local service providers. Picture: PENNY HAW

# Starry eyed in the Cederberg

*PENNY HAW loses her heart to the new Cederberg Heritage Route*

**I**T IS official. I lost my heart to a star in the Cederberg. The problem is, I am not sure exactly which of the many stars I encountered on a recent four-day hike through the region laid claim to it. Chances are I surrendered it early on to Clanwilliam Living Landscape Project's dashing young David van der Westhuizen, who — during the first stage of the newly established Cederberg Heritage Route — guided our party of six along the Jan Dissels River on the outskirts of the

village, and captivated us with his knowledge and enthusiasm for rock art and the history of the region.

Cederberg rock art sites — there are hundreds of them, though not all are accessible to the public — are exceptional in that they provide marked evidence of the trance-like state of the artists who created them and their proclivity for shape-shifting and metaphors.

In half-animal, half-man figures, and depictions of ceremonies and rituals, there are indications of symbolic and/or spiritual

meaning that we may never comprehend. And did you know that, according to San lore, the praying mantis created the eland by lovingly pouring honey over its body?

The insect, at least, knew where his heart was.

It is possible that I tumbled head-over-hooves the next day when I met Jackson. He is one of 20 hale and hearty donkeys that hauled three carts packed with our luggage for more than 20 panoramic but precipitous and potholed kilometres from Pakhuis Pass to the tiny settlement of Brugkraal.

Jackson and his long-eared, shaggy-coated colleagues — steered and sweet-talked by drivers Johannes Ockhuis, David Swartz and Gerrie Theron, and strapped together in traditional harness to quaint old carts — tread the same stony tracks their equine ancestors did centuries ago, transporting goods and folk to and from the white-housed mission villages, farms and major routes in the area.

Perhaps, though, the donkey didn't do it

**Continued on Page 2**

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# Slack packing in scenic beauty

Continued from Page 1

and instead I readily handed my heart to our hostess, Regina Manuel, later that night when — with a smile as wide as the nearby Biedouw Valley and eyes as bright as the Namaqualand daisies that densely carpeted the veld along the route — she presented us with a variety of eight delicious hot dishes.

This, despite a dearth of electricity due to the disability, for three days prior and inclusive of our stay, of Eskom.

Or maybe Regina's neighbour, Benjamin Zimmerer, stole my heart when he arrived, guitar in hand, to enthusiastically regale us with a jovial melody about, what else, but the donkey cart trail from Pakhuis Pass.

On the other hand, I know I felt my spirit soar (and heart fly away?) the next day when, high up among the gigantic and curiously fashioned red-orange rocks in the heart of the Cederberg Wilderness Area, we saw a pair of Black eagles wheeling against the brilliant blue sky.

Then it missed a beat again as we gazed in awe when our guide for the day, Donovan Hesselman, pointed to the fresh spoor of a leopard in the dusty path ahead of

us. Later that day, distracted by four fat dassies that watched us lazily from their rocky sun bed on the boulders above our path, I failed to notice a pair of fleet-footed Klipspringer that apparently leap across the grassy plateau above Grasvlei.

If, however, the eagles did not take flight with my heart, then I am certain that I fell for Tannie Noss (Maria) Solomon that night when — cold, tired and hungry — we misguidedly stumbled into her neat and cosy guesthouse in Heuningvlei and she welcomed us warmly, regardless of the intrusion. (We were actually scheduled to stay in other accommodation in the village.)

Possibly, though, I lost my heart the day after the burbling Dwarsrivier that tumbles down the shady Krakadouw Pass and which is abundantly fringed by bracken, lance-leaved myrtle, wild almond, palmiet rush and yellowwood trees.

Or perhaps I gratefully gave it to that day's guide, Abraham Jantjies when, pulling his beanie tightly over his ears against the cold, he pointed out the first sighting of our accommodation for the night in the Boskloof valley below.

Or perhaps I lost my heart that



**WALKING THE TALK:** Above, the Cederberg Heritage Route is a good, brisk walk, rather than a hair-raising hike, through breathtaking mountains and, below, gorgeous fields of flowers; bottom left, local transport thoughtfully sports a registration number. Pictures: PENNY HAW

night to the most profuse and brilliant galaxy I have ever tipped my head back for.

**T**HE Cederberg Heritage Route began when a group of Cape Town-based, long-time hiking enthusiasts, led by Denis le Jeune and Peter Hart, suggested to Cape Nature the organisation develop a portaged, multiday "slack packing" trail in the northern part of the area, catering particularly for individuals and groups with interests in the unique flora and fauna, geology, botany, rock art, history, culture, heritage and archaeology of the region.

Besides facilitating a new kind of access to the area and its people, the plan was to help promote sustainable ecotourism by inviting communities to provide overnight accommodation and catering, transport for luggage, guided walks and other appropriate services for hikers.

The overriding objective was that revenue from the route would directly benefit local communities.

The result was the establishment of a voluntary, not-for-gain association with a written constitution, whose founding member organisations include the Moravian Church at Wupperthal, the Wupperthal Tourism Association, Western Cape Nature Conservation Board, the Clanwilliam Tourism Association and the Clanwilliam Living Landscape Project.

The beneficiaries are David, the rock art expert; Jackson, the donkey's owners and drivers; Regina and Maria, the hosts at the guesthouses; Abraham and Donovan, the guides; Benjamin, the musician; and several other people and their families in the area who somehow contribute to the extraordinary experience of the route.

While the four-night trail which — in case you missed this earlier — I thoroughly enjoyed, is for the more robust hiker, the three-night trail on the route is suitable for walkers of average



fitness. It is ideal for a long weekend in the mountains in that you arrive in Clanwilliam in the late afternoon and settle in.

The following morning you are guided on a two- to three-hour rock art walk to a couple of the rock art sites. After a picnic lunch you are transferred to the top of the Pakhuis Pass where you meet the Heuningvlei donkey carts. You walk along the jeep track to Heuningvlei with occasional optional donkey cart rides.

The following day you are guided on a magnificently scenic five- to six-hour walk up and over the Krakadouw pass and into the Boskloof valley, where you stay overnight before departing the following morning.

The five-night trail offers, in addition to the four-night route,

an optional hike up Krakadouw peak, which is the highest mountain in the northern Cederberg, as well as a hike all the way to the picturesque mission village of Wupperthal.

The final day includes the Sevilla Rock Art trail, which covers nine separate rock art sites during a three-hour hike back to Clanwilliam.

I fell in love at least twice a day on the Cederberg Heritage Route. But, as a hiking companion told me during the trip, I too am robust and so, happily, I will leave my heart there — to be visited regularly in years to come.

■ *The writer was hosted by the Cederberg Heritage Route (027) 482-2444 [www.cedheroute.co.za](http://www.cedheroute.co.za)*



*"The next day ... high up among the gigantic and curiously fashioned red-orange rocks in the heart of the Cederberg Wilderness Area, we saw a pair of Black eagles wheeling against the brilliant blue sky"*

## In search of the Vierkleur and the quiet life

**K**IMBERLEY, as the absentee is constantly reminded, was once an important place but, for a while, not as important as Klipdrift, as visitors will attest. Klipdrift, as everyone knows, is now Barkly West, about half an hour's drive north of the Big Hole on the banks of the Vaal River.

For one thing, the pub in the pump house serves a better lunch than anything you might want to drink on a hot and dry day anywhere near the Big Hole. The blokes at the bar know things, too. As far as they know, there are indeed fish in the river.

That is about the extent of their fishing information, though there is a bait-fishers' club that we won't mention.

The pump house gang bothers only with really important knowledge. They know, for instance, that Klipdrift was once as good as part of the Old Transvaal, though the Boer leader



*On the water*

*"Cecil John Rhodes was said to have made more money from the diamond business in one day than the average man would make in a lifetime"*

Andries Pretorius never managed to raise the Vierkleur over the town. It was not for want of trying, but when the time came to run up the flag, it was nowhere to be found. Lost in the crowd, some would say.

All this is true, of course, and the pump house gang quotes liberally from their local newspaper, the Visarend, to give substance to their assertions.

The story goes, as written in the paper by Dirk Visser, editor, subeditor, sales rep, layout artist, distribution manager, CEO and owner, that sometime in the late 1800s the Cape Colony government observed developments on the diamond diggings from a distance and in silence. They were particularly quiet when the diggers founded a diggers' republic there and named it Terra Nemo.

The capital would be Klipdrift, since it was then the diamond capital of SA, and one Stafford Parker was elected its first

president. In another first for this little town in the heart of No Man's Land, its name was changed to Parkerton in honour of the president.

There were calls for flag designs, too, but none was made and a national anthem was proposed, but never sung.

For a while in the late 20th century, that nearly also became a South African tradition.

Pretorius, meanwhile, gave up on establishing a diamond monopoly at Klipdrift/Parkerton and withdrew to Pretoria, with Parker and a full-scale expedition hot on his heels. This bankrupted the new republic and moved Cape governor Henry Barkly to commission a man named Campbell to save the diggers from themselves.

Parkerton duly became Barkly West and the diggers might have been saved a lot more if it hadn't been for the discovery of diamonds in 1871 on the De Beer

brothers' farm Vooruitzicht, but most of them left for the New Rush to the Colesberg Koppie.

There were so many diamonds there (14 504 carats, which is the equivalent of about three tons) that Vooruitzicht also had a name change, to Kimberley, after the British Secretary of State, the Earl of Kimberley, even if the Boers of the Orange Free State claimed the district theirs and even if the district officially belonged to the Griqua under the Keate Award.

That is more or less when Kimberley was an important town, though it wouldn't last long. By 1912 the diggers had finished digging the world's biggest hole by hand and quit to allow the great cloud of dust to settle.

The great South African travel writer Tom Bulpin described Kimberley as having undergone a metamorphosis "with money providing the cocoon out of which a dusty caterpillar, transformed into a butterfly emerged complete with

social graces, libraries, fine buildings, theatres, gardens and civic airs". Nevertheless, Nicolaas de Beer, who owned the land that had become Kimberley, never grew to like town life. He sold the property for 6 000 guineas and left for the quiet life in Old Transvaal.

Barney Barnato, on the other hand, received £5.3m for the Big Hole and Cecil John Rhodes was said to have made more money from the diamond business in one day than the average man would make in a lifetime.

But by the 1930s it was all over. Kimberley has not changed much since then, except perhaps that the paint is peeling a bit more than before the Great Depression. The land is still dry and the streets still dusty. And the best thing to do when you get there is still to push on for a bit, to the north, to the river, and the quiet life in what might have been the Old Transvaal.

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