

## Green in Africa



# On track, off the grid

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ALTHOUGH we had to share it with numerous cars that apparently had to be somewhere in a hurry, the road from Steytleville to Addo is incredibly beautiful. Flanked by implacable mountains, the Karoo reaching out to touch their base, the sky marked by wispy stretched-out cottonwool clouds as if a child had taken foam and pulled it across a panoramic canvas, this was mohair country.

However, most people, including us, come to the Eastern Cape to see elephants, not sheep. The smell of citrus heralded our arrival in the Sunday's River Valley, where we'd be staying at Woodall Country House and Spa, fittingly located on a citrus farm.

Sourcing their employees locally, supplementing their kitchens from the organic vegetable garden, using biodegradable products and energy-saving measures such as thermal insulation and an eco-friendly heat pump, Woodall is committed to conserving the environment – even using local and recycled materials in construction.

It is also an active force in the Thembulethu Trust Church Feeding Scheme, providing crèches in local communities with basic food-stuffs, clothing and other essential items.

We couldn't leave without going on an Addo elephant tour. Met with big smiles and laughs when we suggested going on our scooters, we reluctantly joined the sunset game drive.

Proclaimed in 1931, when only 16 elephants remained in the area, Addo is now home to more than 550 elephants, lions, buffalo, hyena, leopards and a variety of antelope and zebra species, to name a few. In fact, the park is to expand into a 264 000-hectare mega-park, linking Addo to the Garden Route protected areas. We saw numerous elephants, including an eight-day-old baby, and it soon became a greater challenge to try to spot an eland.

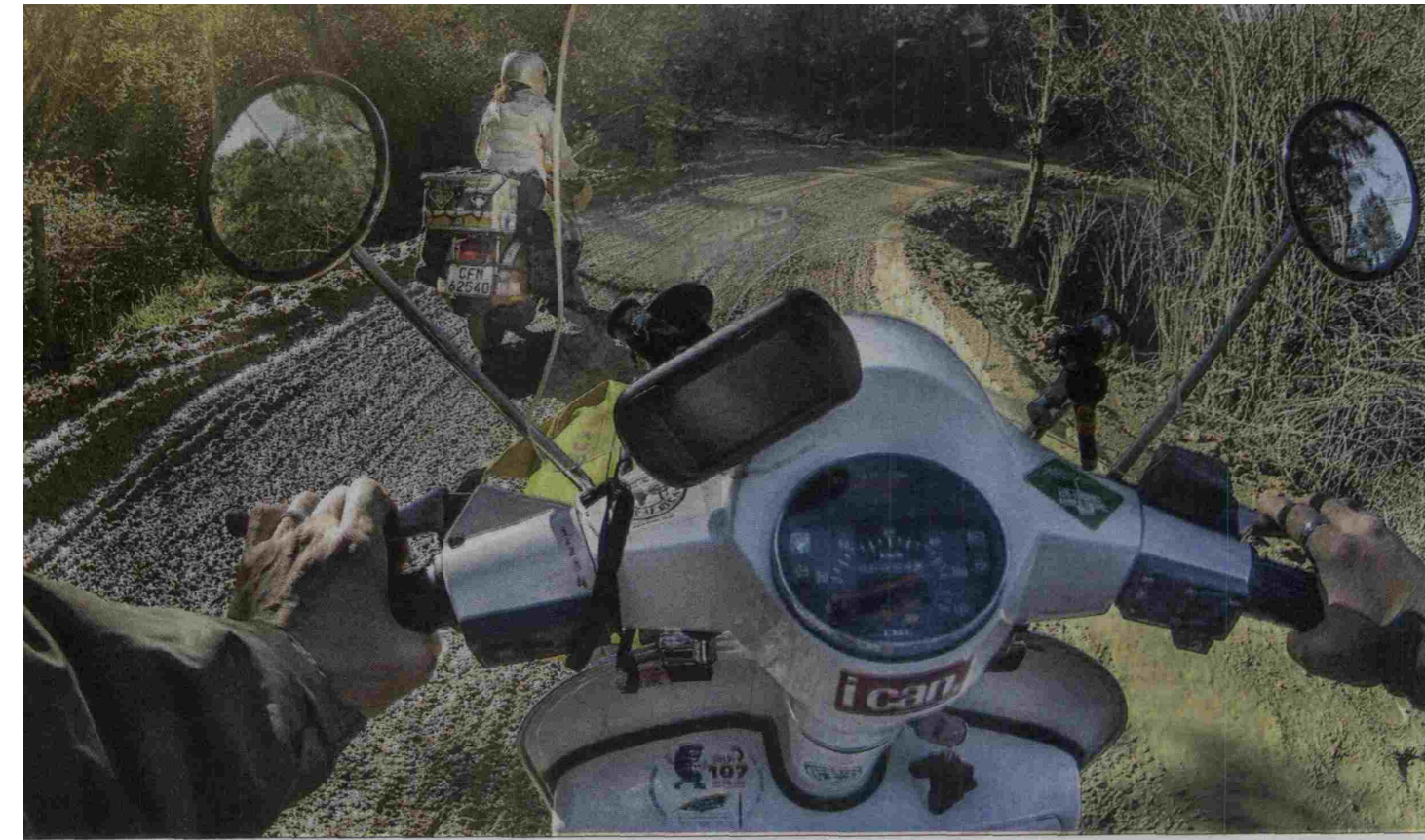
Back on the road, mohair country became frontier country, and we imagined travelling on ox wagons as the 1820 settlers had done. Fortunately we were somewhat faster, managing to catch the last day of the Grahamstown Festival and even making it to a show.

And then we headed into the horizon on our mechanical horses, destined for the Amathole Mountains, where we'd be staying at Terra Khaya Backpackers, on Chillington Farm in Hogsback. Driving through the tiny village of Hogsback, the road became gravel, before quickly turning into a quagmire of mud, traversable only in slow motion with legs akimbo.

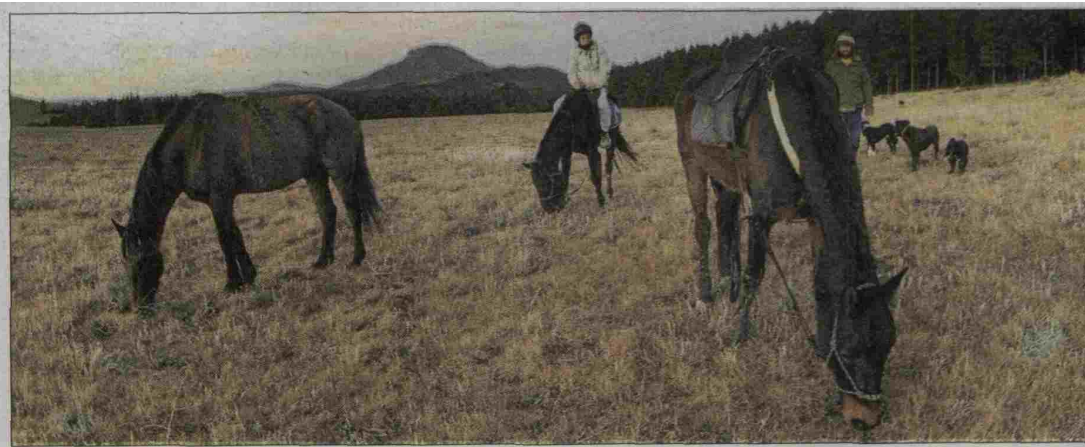
Our next obstacle was a steep and twisting downhill paved with two exceedingly thin stretches of cement and a slick-mud inner that we skidded down in first gear.

Finally reaching Terra Khaya at the top of the hill, characterised by more waterlogged gravel, I slid into an undignified tumble and resolve to get dual-purpose tyres.

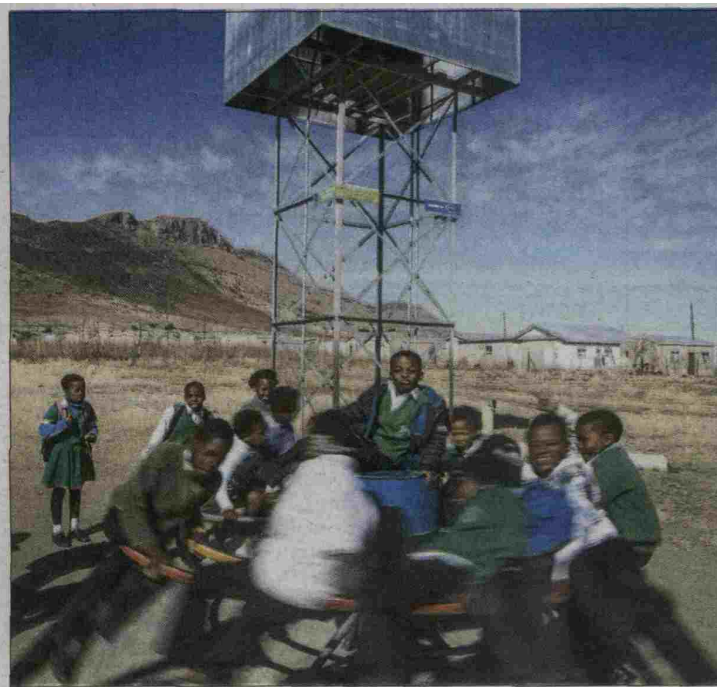
Terra Khaya is the real deal – off the grid with just enough solar power to charge minor electrical appliances, water sourced from the stream and wattle-powered heating and cooking, Terra Khaya offers accommodation that is a balm for the soul, with comfortable township-style shacks made from rubbish and wattle that looked out over strikingly beautiful views.



BLAZING A TRAIL: Slowing down to clear the slippery mud on the way to Hogsback.



MANE ROAD: Enjoying a sunset ride in Hogsback with Shane Eades.



FILLING UP: A merry-go-round pumps up water from the borehole.

Compost toilets, a permaculture garden and both rain and grey water harvesting complete the wholly eco-friendly picture.

Owner and founder Shane Eades also runs Amathole Horse Trails, practising natural horsemanship, which means a symbiotic relation-

## A trip to rescue a horse found us hiking to the top of a waterfall

ship where the horses don't wear bits, and are backed instead of broken. We couldn't miss taking a sunset ride, galloping through the twilight forest into a vast clearing lit with the red-toned hues of the sun.

Magic seems to be part of the package at Terra Khaya – a trip to rescue a fallen horse found us hiking to the top of a secret waterfall at the convergence of two valleys, overlooking an indigenous forest.

And then to East London, a whirlwind of activity that started with the monthly Green Living meeting at Peas on Earth, an organic food garden and permaculture project near the Kei Mouth. From Lilyfontein School, an eco-school with a thriving permaculture garden, to the Food and Trees for Africa project at Unathi Mkefa Primary School in Queenstown, where principal Phumzile Milo

hopes to turn the school into a self-sustainable farm, we rushed from project to project.

The Unathi Mkefa school's organic vegetable garden was started in 2004 to provide healthy food for the children, and now sells potatoes, cabbage, spinach, beetroot, lettuce, carrots and beans to the community at highly reduced rates. Water is pumped up from a borehole – powered by kids playing on the merry-go-round.

We visited a food forest outside Mdantsane at Inkwezi Lokhusa Permaculture farm, an inspiring urban permaculture project in an apartment complex in Quigney, where Artwell Chivhinge uses old milk cartons to grow seedlings, and lastly an eco-village near Haga Haga called Khula Dhamma, where renewable energy, organic food, sustainable livelihoods and peaceful lifestyles are paramount.

Even Stutterheim made its way on to our agenda, with a visit to the Shire eco-lodge. An architectural masterpiece, the Shire has four chalets set in a semi-circle facing the beautiful Afromontane forest. Built completely out of wood, each chalet is a unique curved shape, which also assists in natural cooling – the hot air rises to the top of the chalet where it can be easily released by drawstring roof windows.

The Shire is also home to an indigenous nursery, an organic food garden and orchard, while a large reservoir (230 000 litres) stores water from the river.

Trucks blaring, cars overtaking us closer than necessary and friendly waves from road workers and we were back in East London, my home town, for a short spell of relaxation before we brave the infamous roads of the Transkei.

● Andrews and List are on a 7500km carbon-neutral scooter safari to document SA's natural beauty and environmental projects. See [www.eco-friendly-africa-travel.com](http://www.eco-friendly-africa-travel.com) or [www.facebook.com/EcoFriendlyAfricaTravel](http://www.facebook.com/EcoFriendlyAfricaTravel) or [www.twitter.com/greeninafrica](http://www.twitter.com/greeninafrica)