

Heuningvlei Hospitality and Donkey-Carts



The South African Senior Scout Adventure was the first major Scouting activity to celebrate the Centenary of Scouting. This biennially organised, fun-filled series of activities, ranging from rock-climbing and para sailing to backwoods cooking, commando and (important in modern South Africa) AIDS awareness, happened over 10 days across the New Year 2007.

A new activity, in spite of this being the 17th Adventure, and a long association with the small communities in the Cederberg, a mountainous wilderness area some 200 km north of Cape Town, was to bring local people of Heuningvlei directly into one of the activities.

A fine attraction in these communities is the continued use of the donkey-cart as a means of transport. While not uncommon in the poorer rural areas of the northern part of the Cape, donkeys are inexorably being replaced by pickup trucks, as more money filters into isolated populations. One reason for this is the out-migration of the youth to schools and jobs in more urban areas, and remittances back to families still 'on the land'.



The donkey-cart is a relic of the old gig and carriage life. The cart is basic, built on old car suspensions, and the harness made up of available nylon webbing and leather (the latter would have been made in the community in the not-so-distant past, as they still have a shoe-making industry in the local church centre at Wuppertal).

This exciting, old-fashioned transportation was the first idea of trying to involve the Scouts with a community. Once the germ of the idea had taken hold, identifying a community was not too difficult, since Heuningvlei (literally: 'Honey Valley'), a small hamlet of 25 families on the north-eastern side of the Cederberg, had already advertised their donkey-cart services, but with limited response from the public.



In discussion with one of the village elders, Abraham Ockhuis, John Mütti, chief organiser of the 2007 Adventure, the basic idea grew to include the Scouts over-nighting with individual families, and being fed a home-cooked meal by the ladies of the village. Thus Scouts and community came into direct contact, and the Adventure provided a welcome source of income to families, whose only real source of funds is from the increasingly valuable Rooibos tea crop.

The writers were invited to be the base leaders, as we had had experience in a previous Adventure of 2004, by taking a local Patrol made up of boys and girls of the Cederberg, through the Adventure's activities.

The Heuningvlei community took the Scouts eagerly into their homes, working very hard to make the visitors comfortable. Even for one night, we believe the simple way of life of these subsistence farmers was an amazing contrast to the life of the mainly urban Scouts on the Adventure. They

were introduced to the traditional way of processing Rooibos, as well as shown how wheat is threshed using donkeys, and the simple way of using the wind to winnow the chaff by tossing into the air.

In contrast to the energy intensive life of the automobile, the internet or cellphone, such energy self-sufficiency should be really attractive to the independently-minded Scout, as so much of the basics of Scouting are intrinsic to being able to live and feed oneself on a sustained basis, without having to depend on the 'global' economy.

The 'jewel-in-the-crown', of course, were the donkey-carts, which all visiting Patrols got a chance to ride in or out of the village. The carts also carried backpacks, so even when Scouts were not riding, they had the pleasant opportunity to walk without packs through one of the loveliest and most rugged parts of this wilderness mountain system.



We believe the entire exercise was a great success on both Scouting and community sides. There is a potential, however, to make it even more of a success, as the experience and reporting allows fertilization of ideas, particularly in supporting the ideals of Scouting. At least one Patrol Leader has already asked if they might help in the proposed construction of an overnight facility for hikers, which is due to be complete by mid-July in the old school house.

Already we are aware that we are contributing to significant changes within the community, but a window of opportunity is still available to South African Scouting that should not be dismissed lightly. We are quite confident that the next Adventure would be greatly enhanced by once more involving the community at this base. As most Scouts on the Adventure had a chance to see Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth* about the use (and abuse) of the Earth's resources, they would be all the more conscious that self-sufficiency in life is becoming more and more difficult. How much greater introduction can be given to the Scout participants to these last remnants of basic rural life, will be dependent on the ingenuity of the Scout Leaders to firmly grasp what a fast-disappearing opportunity this is to Scouting's 'ideal', and to integrate the self-sustainable concept into the activity.

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