

CHRISTMAS EDITION | KERSUITGAWE
2|2025

The Hourglass Die Uurglas

IN THIS EDITION:

- TITIA BALLOT SE GOEIE VRYDAG OP GRAAFF-REINET
- GRAAFF-REINET AND THE ROYAL VISIT OF 1925
- PREHISTORIC PATHWAYS TO OUR KAROO ORIGINS IN GRAAFF-REINET



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Editorial



ANZISKE KAYSER

It is that time of the year again when I sit down to write my Christmas heritage article. Saying “time flies” feels almost too predictable, yet here we are, already nearing the close of another year. Instead of returning to the usual festive themes, I found myself wondering what new angle to pursue. In the quiet early hours of the morning, my thoughts wandered to our weather, our landscapes, and yes—our food—but most significantly to the African spirit of *ubuntu*. And so this year, my reflection turns to the idea of *Christmas in Africa*. What better way to open this exploration than with an extract from the 2002 song “Christmas in Cape Town,” a reminder that a South African festive season has its own unique rhythm and beauty.

*You won't see any snow fall
At this time of year
No reindeer in the valley
As the Mistletoe appears*

*And underneath the blue sky
Is a perfect summers day
With beaches filled with people
All the beauty on display*

*Cause when it's Christmas in Cape Town
There's happiness and joy
And smiles upon the faces
Of every boy and girl
The sun is shining brightly
Over mountains and the seas
When it's Christmas in Cape Town
It's a special place, to be...¹*

¹ See the YouTube video at https://youtu.be/_Zr_Ub94muk?si=FdqhRUe4MbhRIEFf.

In 2002, Edmund Bourne was approached by Bishop Kriel of the Apostolic Church in Cape Town with a special request. He was not asked to write a hymn, but rather to compose a song for a Christmas CD the church intended to produce. Bourne later admitted that this was a daunting task for someone who had never written or composed a song before. Yet he persevered, and the piece he created ultimately became the title track of the church's Christmas album.²

Bourne explained that he struggled to identify with the traditional European imagery of Christmas—the mistletoe, the snow, the reindeer—symbols far removed from our lived reality. Instead, he explored the positive, the familiar, and distinctly South African visuals and moments that bring joy to people across the country. From this reflection, *Christmas in Cape Town* was born. The song was revived in 2022 by David Watkyns, and its message felt especially timely after the suffering and isolation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Much of our heritage has been shaped by European influences and customs. We cannot let the Christmas season pass without putting up a Christmas tree or observing our Christian traditions—these practices have become part of our heritage and hold deep personal meaning for many families, mine included. They are not “wrong”; rather, they form part of our shared cultural tapestry. These inherited symbols coexist beautifully with uniquely South African ones. It contributes to a rich blend of traditions and nuances that come alive in every South African December.

Christmas in Africa carries a unique atmosphere, with the unmistakable rhythm of local life winding down. The Festive Season in Graaff-Reinet echoes summer and sun with late-afternoon thunderstorms, and the cooler evenings are treasured for get-togethers outdoors such as the traditional *braai*. In earlier days, families would pack sun umbrellas and cooler bags especially during public holidays and head to the Nqweba Dam as though it was the Port Elizabeth beachfront. Water has always made all the difference in town; for those without swimming pools, sprinklers and makeshift water games had to do.

² See *The Story Of Christmas in Cape Town* at <https://youtu.be/jjWL-BJ02JA?si=XHh1Ew6Jz5TmNTjd>.

Summer dresses, jumpsuits, shorts and swimming costumes become the uniform of the season as days unfold in the Karoo heat. And of course, Christmas baking fills many homes—ginger biscuits, butter biscuits, and even last-minute fruitcakes. Although fruitcakes are traditionally prepared at least a month in advance, some still brave the heat of a Karoo December to bake them at the very last moment; my mother-in-law among them, faithfully baking in the height of the summer season.

The festive season is as much about community as it is about celebration. Building contractors and many other businesses close for the holidays, the so-called December “breaking-up”, marking the start of the annual shutdown. The last few weeks of work are filled with goodbyes, staff functions, and the anticipation of a well-deserved rest. *Stokvels* also reach their climax as grocery pools are distributed, trolleys overflowing with bulk items like rice, flour, sugar, and festive treats. These familiar rituals symbolise trust and solidarity but also collective saving for the month of January, often accompanied by laughter, music, and shared meals.

The museum does not close during the festive season because this is when our visitors need us most. While many businesses shut down, we remain open, closing only three days a year: Christmas Day, Good Friday, and New Year’s Day. We do this because we are in service of heritage, and it is a privilege to share our stories, collections, and history with everyone who walks through our doors. In the weeks leading up to December, we begin our spring-cleaning and preparations to ensure that the museum is in excellent condition. For the past 28 years, this work has been my calling, and I would not have it any other way. My Christmas in Africa has always included the museum. While others rest, we continue our heritage work, appreciating every opportunity that brings more feet into this space.

During the festive season, we are also reminded of the challenges that many South Africans face—unemployment, poverty, and social hardships. Yet in our communities, the spirit of *Ubuntu* remains strong. Neighbours support one another, share what they have, and reach out to those in need. These acts of

generosity reflect both the values of our heritage and the enduring principles of compassion, kindness, and togetherness at the heart of Christmas.

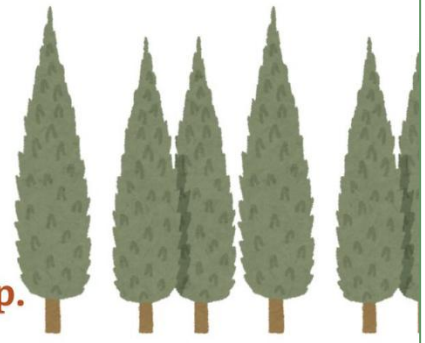
In this season, let us listen to the voice of Christmas—not just in celebration, but in service—and commit to making a difference, however small, in the lives of those around us.

Anziske Kayster



Titia Ballot se "Goeie Vrydag in Graaff-Reinet":

'n kunstenaarsblik op verdeeldheid en geloof in 'n Karoodorp.



In November 1990 berig die *Graaff-Reinet Advertiser* dat een van Titia Ballot se kunswerke, *Goeie Vrydag in Graaff-Reinet*, in die versameling van die Hester Rupert Kunsmuseum opgeneem is. Hierdie nuutste toevoeging tot die kunsmuseum se versameling, wat as 'n Suid-Afrikaanse kunsskat gereken word, het plaaslik groot opslae gemaak.

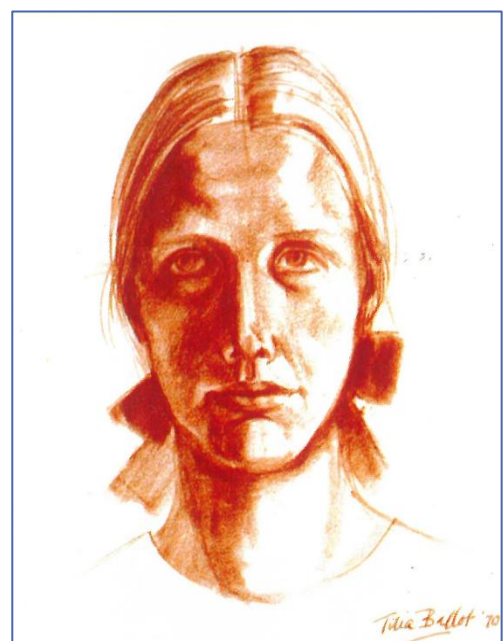
Agtergrond

Titia (Elizabeth Laetitia) Ballot (née du Toit), toe al 'n gerekende kunstenaar met 'n voorliefde vir kulture, het bekendheid verwerf omdat sy deur middel van kuns die grense tussen kulture wou oorsteek en mense blywend met mekaar wou versoen. Gebore in 1941 te Clocolan in die Vrystaat, het sy in Bloemfontein en Pretoria grootgeword. In 1963 het sy 'n BA graad in Beeldende Kunste aan die Universiteit van Pretoria behaal, daarna haar loopbaan as kunsonderwyser in Johannesburg begin en dit in Pretoria voorgesit. In latere jare het sy 'n dosent in Drukgrafika en Kunsteorie aan die Potchefstroomse Universiteit geword en vanaf 1986 die pos as Senior Lektor en Departementshoof beklee.



Titia Ballot in haar ateljee
in Hermanus (2015)

(<https://www.fynartsgallery.co.za/titiaballot/>)



Selfportret (1970)

uit Titia Ballot: hartklop van 'n etser:
Oorsigtentoonstelling-katalogus (2007/8)

In 1981 word haar man, George Muller Ballot, aangestel as gesant van die Kultuurraad by die Suid-Afrikaanse ambassade in Bonn, Wes-Duitsland. Sy werksopdrag was om alle Suid-Afrikaanse kulture daar te bevorder. Tussen 1982 en 1985 het sy dus as vryskutkunstenaar in Bonn gewerk en gewoon. In die 1990's was sy ook verbonde aan die Universiteitsmuseum van Stellenbosch asook as gaskunstenaar by die *Frans Masereel Centrum voor Grafiek* in Kasterlee, België.

Titia Ballot word beskou as 'n denkende kunstenaar wat die sosio-politieke milieu waarin sy haar bevind, ondersoekend in haar kuns inkorporeer. Die ekgierigheid van haar kuns wat ontstaan het as gevolg van haar persoonlike wêrelds-en lewensbeskouing, blyk duidelik uit die kunswerke wat tydens haar loopbaan die lig gesien het. As jong kunstenaar het haar werke die ongekompliseerdheid van landskappe vasgevang, mettertyd het dit ontwikkel en gegroei sodat dit later kultuurgrense aangespreek het en perspektiewe uit haar leefwêreld en Christelike geloofsbeskouing kon deel. Haar werke handel oor haar interaksie met die mens en sy kultuur: van Europeër to inheemse kind van Suider-Afrika en oor (haar eie) Afrikanerskap en die nuwe Suid-Afrika na 1990. Dit verkondig dus ook 'n dringende boodskap van gedeelde erfenis en versoening. In die woorde van Annie Flerackers-Ruys en Zirk van den Berg bring haar kuns die boodskap "*dat het eerder gaat over een liefdevolle verzoening dan over een woedend verzet*".³ Sedert 1970 het sy al reeds 32 solo-uitstallings op haar kerfstok. Nie net figureer sy as kernkunstenaar in 'n aantal uitstallings nie, maar neem ook deel aan groeputstallings, plaaslik sowel as oorsee. In 2008 ontvang sy die Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns se Erepenning vir Visuele Kuns (Grafiese drukkuns) en in dieselfde jaar vind 'n oorsiguitstalling van 40 jaar se werk by die universiteite van Potchefstroom en Stellenbosch, plaas.

Ballot word beskryf as 'n kultuurmens, 'n kunstenaar met 'n sterk historiese inslag in haar werke. In die laat 1980's vind sy ook haar weg na Graaff-Reinet

³ Annie Flerackers-Ruys (1937 – 2017) was 'n prominent taalkundige in die Vlaams-Duitse kultuur- en politieke-beweging. Zirk van den Berg het voorheen as kunskritikus by *Die Burger* gewerk.

en word die Karoodorp en sy inwoners die onderwerp van haar ondersoek op doek. Die resultaat? *Goeie Vrydag in Graaff-Reinet*.

Die Skildery

Volgens Ballot was daar 'n baie goeie rede vir haar paasnaweekbesoek aan Graaff-Reinet.⁴ Hierdie rede is gekoppel aan die Ballot-familie se verbintenis met Graaff-Reinet: in 1986 is sy met George Muller Ballot getroud – 'n Hugenote-afstammeling van die stamvader Ds. H.W. Ballot (1765–1814), wat veral bekend was vir sy bemiddelingswerk in die grensgeskilte tussen Boer, Brit en Xhosa tydens sy ampstermyn as predikant op Graaff-Reinet (1798–1800). Aangesien Graaff-Reinet 'n historiese grensgebied is waar verskillende kulture mekaar ontmoet het, het Ballot ná hul terugkeer uit Duitsland in 1987 weer die dorp besoek. Baie van haar navorsingsreise is soms sonder haar man onderneem, en met haar besoek aan Graaff-Reinet het sy 'n gids nodig gehad om haar deur die hele dorp wat die bruin en swart woongebiede ingesluit het, te begelei. Gelukkig het sy Ds. Gawie Basson, toe 'n predikant in die destydse Sendingkerk, ontmoet, wat haar die hele – en toe nog verdeelde – dorp laat verken het en al haar vrae beantwoord het.

Ballot vertel dat sy haar kamera byderhand gehad het en 'n hele aantal tonele op film opgeneem het. Saans, terug in die losieshuis in Graaff-Reinet, het sy haar indrukke vinnig in haar sketsboeke vasgelê. Daarbenewens, het sy ook 'n gewoonte om elke dag in haar joernaal te skryf en sodoende kon sy rekord hou van haar ervarings en indrukke deur dit onmiddellik neer te pen. Wanneer sy uiteindelik weer in haar ateljee kom, verwerk sy al hierdie notas, sketse en foto's, wat dan die grondslag vorm vir die ontwikkeling van haar skilderye en grafiese werke.⁵

Goeie Vrydag in Graaff-Reinet is 'n pastelskildery op suurvrye papier met afmetings van 550mm by 850mm.⁶ Die Cradockstraat-begraafplaas, met sy rye

⁴ Titia Ballot, Elektroniese Onderhoud, 22 September 2025.

⁵ Titia Ballot, Elektroniese Onderhoud, 22 September 2025.

⁶ Ballot verduidelik dat die skildery met poeierkryte gemaak is en daarom 'n skildery eerder as 'n skets genoem kan word. Die poeier meng maklik en word gereeld in kuns gebruik. Dit kan ook met die vinger aangewend word.

sipresse aan weerskante van die voetpaadjie wat in die middel van die begraafplaas is, is die mees-herkenbare element van die skildery.



Goeie Vrydag in Graaff-Reinet
(Rupert Museum, Stellenbosch)

Ander herkenbare elemente soos die kern van die dorp met die kerkoring en (heel moontlik) grasdakhuisie is ook duidelik sigbaar so ook die rye veelkleurige platdakhuisies van Umasizakhe. In werklikheid sal die kerkoring nie vanuit hierdie oogpunt sigbaar wees nie en ook nie Umasizakhe nie. Die ware uitleg word egter in die skildery herangskik sodat daar 'n duidelike onderskeid getref word tussen Graaff-Reinet se wit en swart woonbuurte. Gawie Basson verwys in sy ontleding van die skildery in die *Graaff-Reinet Advertiser*, na die kontras tussen die grafte aan weerskante van die die paadjie: aan die een kant is die oorvol begraafplaas van die swart bevolking met ry op ry onderbeklemtoonde grafte en aan die ander kant is die “witkant” met sy ongebruikte ruimtes en historiese grafte.⁷ Laasgenoemde is 'n verwysing na 'n gedeelte van Albert van

⁷ G. Basson. “Nuwe Kunsskat in Hester Rupert Kunsmuseum”, *Die Graaff-Reinet Advertiser*, November 15, 1990.

Lingen, die eerste predikant van die Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk in Graaff-Reinet se kisgraf, so genoem omdat 'n eenvoudige kisvormige struktuur bo-op die graf geplaas is om as 'n tipe monument te dien. Die graf is aan die linkerkant van die kerkhof se paadjie sigbaar.

Ballot skryf hierdie fokus op verdeeldheid toe aan haar eie belewenis van die wanbalans wat in Suid-Afrika op daardie stadium bestaan het. Sy verduidelik dat haar verhuising na Duitsland ook beteken het dat sy 'n ander tipe grens, hierdie keer 'n kulturele grens, oorgesteek het. Sodoende het sy met meer objektiewiteit en 'n nuwe gesindheid na Suid-Afrika en sy mense begin kyk. Die “skreiende ongelykheid, onreg en die verdoeseling van die waarheid” motiveer haar ook om met haar terugkeer aan die einde van 1985 na die Potchefstroomse Universiteit, alles in die stryd te werp om die brug van 'n gedeelde geloofsoortuiging na alle mede-Christene te bou.⁸

Goeie Vrydag in Graaff-Reinet dra dus 'n sosio-politieke boodskap oor, een wat as 'n verdeelde gemeenskap van teenstellings in die skildery uitgebeeld word: die kerkhof en die dorp, die donker skaduwees teenoor die lig, die duideliksiggbare toring van die Grootkerk teenoor die amper onsigbare, toringlose kerkie in die “township”. Die paadjie wat nie net die kontrasterende dele van die kerkhof verdeel nie, verdeel ook die hele skildery. Basson verwys na die “witkant” as die georganiseerde gedeelte van die begraafplaas waar die dooies van die lewendes deur 'n wit aaneenlopende ringmuur geskei word. Dit word in kontras gebring met die “swartkant” waar die lewendes en die dooies, in teenstelling, saamwoon in hulle eie leefwêreld. Daar is niks histories of romanties wat hiermee geassosieer kan word nie, dit is eerder 'n voorstelling van die tyd waarin die skildery sy ontstaan gehad het en die kunstenaar se eie stryd om aanspreeklikheid te aanvaar vir haar aandeel in die verdeeldheid tydens apartheid. Sy erken dat dit ook geld vir die verdeeldheid wat sy tans ervaar.

Basson beskryf dit soos volg:

⁸ Titia Ballot, Elektroniese Onderhoud, 22 September 2025.

“.. niks het verander sedert die koms van die sendelinge nie. Die duisternis en vreemd-vir-mekaar-wees, is steeds aanwesig en laat ’n ontstellende neerdrukkende wolk oor die toekoms hang. Terwyl hierdie werk die bittere ironie van apartheid ten spyte van die Evangelie, sterk na vore bring, het dit ook ’n boodskap van hoop. Die boodskap van hoop word verbeeld in die simbole van die Evangelie; lig teenoor donkerte, ’n smal voetpad wat nie afgekamp is nie, maar toeganklik van alle kante af. Die oop poort aan die einde van die voetpad wat na buite lei, na die lig toe!”

(Gawie Basson, 1990)⁹

Die Kunstenaar en die Skildery

Goeie Vrydag in Graaff-Reinet is die eerste van drie ander kunswerke wat deur die jare gedurende Paasfees totstand gekom het. *Goeie Vrydag R.S.A April 1994* het net voor die ontstaan van die nuwe Suid-Afrikaanse demokrasie die lig gesien en daarna het *Triptiek vir die Beloofde Land* gevolg. Skilderye werk in beelde en dra sodoende die boodskap van die skepper van die kuns oor. Met *Goeie Vrydag* deel Ballot haar eie onrus en gevoel oor die toestand destyds in Suid-Afrika en beleef sy Paasfees as ’n tyd van oordenking. As gelowige ervaar sy elke jaar op *Goeie Vrydag* dat sy weer opnuut rekenskap wil gee van hoekom sy glo. As Christen kan sy nooit vergeet en wegkyk wanneer Christus se lyding aan die kruis herdenk word nie. Hierdie skildery spreek dus ook haar eie skuld en stryd aan ten opsigte van haar persoonlike aandeel in die skreiende onreg wat destyds in Suid-Afrika besig was om te gebeur. Dit lig ook haar eie (en nie iemand anders) verwoordbaarheid vir haar aandeel in die onreg, toe. Ballot is van mening dat haar besoek aan Graaff-Reinet bygedra het om te verstaan wat God beplan het met haar lewe en ook vir die skeppingsgawe wat sy uit Sy hand ontvang het. Deur haar kuns word sy ’n spieëlbeeld van haar Skepper. Hierdie kunswerk “verbeeld alles wat destyds in my hart geleef het want wat die hart van vol is, loop die mond van oor ...”. Dit (die hart) bly steeds die bron waaruit

⁹ Uittreksel uit G. Basson. “Nuwe Kunsskat in Hester Rupert Kunsmuseum”, *Die Graaff-Reinet Advertiser*, November, 15, 1990 en ook Titia Ballot: hartklop van ’n etser: Oorsigtentoonstelling-katalogus (2007/8) gepubliseer deur die Universiteitsmuseum: Stellenbosch.

sy haar visioenêre vormtaal put. Dus is die boodskap wat sy deur haar kuns wil tuisbring een van versoening en heling. Die boodskap wat sy alreeds in haar ouerhuis ontvang het, is dat Christene ook aktiviste vir verandering kan wees.

Die begraafplaas in *Goeie Vrydag in Graaff-Reinet*, versinnebeeld die karakter van die verdeelde dorp soos deur Ballot ervaar tydens haar besoek aan Graaff-Reinet. Haar boodskap of 'preek', soos Gawie Basson dit noem, wat sy met hierdie werk wou oordra is een van hoop – selfs midde in die gebroke wêreld waarin ons leef. Die skildery is ook 'n verlenging van die blye boodskap wat elke Christen veronderstel is om te verstaan: God het Sy Seun geoffer, Hy het vir ons vryspraak gemaak sodat ons hoopvol en positief kan lewe. Die belofte van hoop word verder versterk omdat die hele ontwerp verbind word deur lyne wat uiteindelik 'n kruis vorm. Hierdie kruis herinner aan Jesus se kruisdood maar ook die mens se onverbiddelikheid en onmenslikheid teenoor sy medemens. Terselfdertyd herhaal dit ook die deurlopende boodskap van die kruis hard en duidelik: vergifnis en versoening. Die lig wat die kruis op Goeie Vrydag na die wêreld toe bring en die duisternis verdryf loop uiteindelik uit op 'n poort van lig aan die einde van die voetpaadjie en is tekenend van die eerste lig wat op Paassondag ervaar word en die opstanding van Christus op Paassondag wat 'n nuwe lewe saam aankondig. Nie net word dit 'n boodskap vir Graaff-Reinet, 'n dorp met 'n sterk Christelike inslag sedert sy ontstaan in 1786 nie, maar ook vir die hele wêreld.

Om haar kunswerke as 'n vorm van protes te verstaan moet daar ingekoop word in Ballot se vorm van protes. As Christen glo sy dat 'n mens die wêreld kan verander nie deur woedende verset nie maar om verantwoordelikheid te aanvaar vir jou eie aandeel aan die onreg, pyn en vervreemding wat deur die ideologie van apartheid veroorsaak is. Dit het ook beteken dat sy by haarself en by haar eie mense moes begin om gesindhede te probeer verander sodat die wantroue afgebreek kon word en heling kan plaasvind. Sy herken ruiterslik dat sy egter deeglik daarvan bewus is hoe moeilik dit is om mense se 'harde' verpolitiseerde harte te verander, veral in gemeenskappe soos Graaff-Reinet,

dus sal aannames dat niks nog verander het sedert die dae van Apartheid nie, haar nie verbaas nie. ¹⁰

Ten Slotte

Goeie Vrydag in Graaff-Reinet is in Oktober 1990 deur Mev Huberte Rupert by die Dorpstraat Galery in Stellenbosch aangekoop en in November 1990 word dit in die Hester Rupert Kunsmuseum in Graaff-Reinet ten toon gestel. Tans is dit deel van die Rupertmuseum in Stellenbosch se versameling.

Kuns is 'n vorm van visuele kulturele erfenis. Dit vertel 'n verhaal en is dikwels die naelstring wat mense aan hul herkoms en die verlede bind. *Goeie Vrydag in Graaff-Reinet* bevat 'n diepe simboliese betekenis en verteenwoordig die kunstenaar se godsdienstige oortuigings, -iets wat sy duidelik met die inwoners van Graaff-Reinet maar ook oor landsgrense heen deel. Alhoewel baie daarmee kan vereenselwig, mag ander heeltemal gekant teen die boodskap van die kunswerk wees. Dit is egter die aard van erfenis: nie almal sal noodwendig daarmee saamstem of aanklank daarby vind nie. Tóg strem dit nie Ballot se stem nie en spreek sy die spirituele en emosionele welstand van die inwoners van Graaff-Reinet en hierdie wêreld aan. Deur haar kuns skep sy 'n tasbare historiese rekord van 'n tydperk van verdeeldheid maar ook van hoop wat so kenmerkend was in die 1990 post-apartheid periode en na die vrylating van Nelson Mandela. *Goeie Vrydag* ego die kunstenaar se pleidooi vir versoening wat so broodnodig was in die nuwe demokrasie. Huberte Rupert het duidelik ook hierdie boodskap verstaan en die aanname is dat sy deur die aankoop van hierdie kunswerk, die boodskap verder wou versprei. Die hoop beskaam nie dat hierdie werk toeganklik sal bly sodat dit die boodskap van versoening in 'n samelewing van uiterste polarisering, gedurig kan verkondig.

Titia Ballot is deurlopend besig om haar boodskap te verkondig. Sy en dr. Lydia De Waal, voorheen die direkteur van aan die Universiteitsmuseum te Stellenbosch, is tans besig om 'n manuskrip oor haar lewe en werke saam te stel wat vir publikasie voorberei word. Intussen het sy ook deelgeneem aan ui'n

¹⁰ Titia Ballot, Elektroniese Onderhoud, 22 September 2025.

samewerkingsprojek met Vlaamse/Belgiese grafiese kunstenaars en is genooi is om deel te wees van 'n uitstalling wat as “Inter-Touch” bekend staan. Hierdie uitstalling is op 6 November 2025 by die Universiteit van Antwerpen in België ge-open.

Titia Ballot se kuns bly dus relevant, nie net vir Graaff-Reinet nie, maar ook vir die Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing. Haar kuns bly die stem van ons gewete.

Verwysings:

Gawie Basson. “Nuwe Kunsskat in Hester Rupert Kunsmuseum”, *Die Graaff-Reinet Advertiser*, November, 15, 1990

Tessa Dreyer. 1996. Die Stillewemotief in die Suid-Afrikaanse grafiese Kuns: MA Verhandeling (Universiteit van Pretoria).

Titia Ballot, elektroniese onderhoud, 22 September 2025.

Titia Ballot: hartklop van 'n etser: Oorsigtentoonstelling-katalogus (2007/8) gepubliseer deur die Universiteitsmuseum: Stellenbosch.



Graaff-Reinet Museum Annual Open Day



Join us for a wonderful morning celebrating history, heritage, and community! 🌿

Explore our new exhibitions, wander through our beautiful gardens, or bring your own picnic hamper and enjoy a relaxing picnic on the lawns of Reinet House.



Sunday, 14 December 2025



Urquhart House, The Military Museum & The Old Library:
09:00 – 12:00



Reinet House: 09:00 – 13:00

Free entry!

Everyone is welcome!



📞 049 8923801

🌐 graaffreinetmuseums.co.za

✉ graaffreinetmuseum@intekom.co.za

GRAAFF-REINET AND THE ROYAL VISIT OF 1925



Johannes Haarhoff

(The British Royal family visited Graaff-Reinet on three occasions. The first visit was in 1925 by Edward, the Prince of Wales who later briefly became King Edward VII before he abdicated in 1936. The second visit was in 1934 by his brother George, then the Prince of Wales, who became King George VIII after his brother's abdication in 1936. The third visit was in 1947 by King George VIII with his wife and two daughters Elizabeth (later Queen Elizabeth II) and Margaret. In previous issues of the Hourglass, newsletter of Graaff-Reinet Museum, the 1947 visit was described in June 2016; the 1934 visit in June 2019. In this issue, the focus is on the 1925 visit, exactly 100 years ago.)

Planning the Visit

Shortly after the First World War ended in 1918, King George V dispatched his son Edward, Prince of Wales and later King Edward VIII, to a series of extensive visits to different parts of the empire to express his gratitude for their assistance during the War and to strengthen the ties between the colonies and the British Crown.



Figure 1: HRH Edward, Prince of Wales in 1925
(Wikipedia)

The Prince subsequently visited Canada for 60 days in 1919, Australia for 49 days in 1920 and India for 121 days in 1921/22. His visit to South Africa followed after an invitation by Prime Minister Jan Smuts in 1923. As a result, a visit was planned which included South Africa, Basutoland, Swaziland, Southern and Northern Rhodesia, and the Bechuanaland Protectorate. This extensive visit of 91 days started when the Prince arrived in Cape Town on 30 April 1925 on the *HMS Repulse*. The tour ended with his departure from Cape Town on 29 July 1925.

The Royal visits were renowned to be severely taxing to the Prince. He was confined to a few railway coaches for most of the time and was never completely private. Even at the smallest sidings, people gathered to get a glimpse of him which had to be acknowledged. At larger villages, stops were made for the Prince to disembark, meet and mingle with the waiting crowd and to say a few fitting words. At towns and cities, he was taken on short tours, made multiple speeches to different parts of the community, attend picnics, etc. In the cities, he stayed over for two or three days, the programme packed with speeches, banquets and city tours. This deadly routine continued day after day. In January 1925, while the South African visit was being planned, the Tasmanian newspaper *The Advocate* carried the following snippet:

Arrangements for the Prince of Wales's tour of the South African Union are being made with the greatest care in order to ensure that His Royal Highness shall not be subjected to a ceaseless round of social and sporting functions, which somewhat marred his enjoyment of visits elsewhere. Presumably, on medical advice, the tour is being so arranged that the Prince shall have to himself at least 48 hours in each week for rest periods ...

The tour group travelled in two special trains running in tandem. The train running first was the Pilot Train which housed most of the support staff, equipment and supplies – this train generally ran exactly 30 minutes before the Royal Train, which was reserved for the Royal visitor and his closest aides. During the 1925 visit (before mechanical refrigeration was common), the Pilot

Train even carried some Jersey cows to have fresh milk available at all times which earned it the nickname of the “Cow Train”.

The Midlands Part of the Tour

The visit to Graaff-Reinet followed soon after the start of the tour on 30 April 1925. The official tour schedule between Mossel Bay and Port Elizabeth stated:

- Wednesday 6 May. Arrives at Mossel Bay at 09h30 with a one hour stop. Continues to George, arriving at 14h00.
- Thursday 7 May. Leave George at 17h00 to arrive at Camfer on top of Montagu Pass at 19h20, where the train overnights.
- Friday 8 May. Leave Camfer at 08h35 to arrive at Oudtshoorn at 10h00. Spends the day at Oudtshoorn and leaves 20h30 at night.
- Saturday 9 May. Arrives at Graaff-Reinet at 09h30 and leaves at 10h30. Stops at Middelburg for a stop of 40 minutes. Travels through Rosmead and Noupoot to arrive at Colesberg at 21h00. The Prince leaves the train to be escorted to the farm of Sir Abe Bailey.
- Sunday 10 May. First day at Bailey’s farm.
- Monday 11 May. Second day at Bailey’s farm.
- Tuesday 12 May. Third day at Bailey’s farm. Returns to the train and leaves Colesberg at 23h00.
- Wednesday 13 May. Travels to Port Elizabeth, arriving at 16h30. Except for short stops of 10 minutes for water four times, the only break was a stop at Baroda from 03h30 to 08h30.

At Graaff-Reinet

On 9 May 1925, the Royal Train arrived at Graaff-Reinet. The stop, from 10h30 to 11h30, was a brief one of only 60 minutes. Not much is available on how the Prince’s time was spent in that limited time slot, as the relevant copies of the *Graaff-Reinet Advertiser* were destroyed during the fire at Reinet House in 19??.

The Prince was welcomed at the railway station by the Mayor, Herbert Urquhart – see Figure 2. (Urquhart had the unusual honour of welcoming the next Prince of Wales at Graaff-Reinet in 1934 as well.) The Prince was taken by car on a tour of the town – see Figure 3. A ceremony followed where the Prince met with the community and was presented with a gift from a woman – see Figure 4. The venue was outdoors, which suggests that the ceremony was at the Botanical Garden, where the Prince's brother George was also entertained when he visited Graaff-Reinet in 1934. The driver of the vehicle shown in Figure 3 was Tom Parkes, the owner of the large “Wheatlands” Austin, claimed to be the only one of its kind in the district. The visit to Graaff-Reinet took place just as the finishing touches were added to the Van Ryneveld's Pass Dam, which was formally inaugurated two months later on 14 July 1925.



Figure 2: Prince Edward welcomed by Mayor Herbert Urquhart at the Graaff-Reinet railway station.

(Graaff-Reinet Museum Collection)

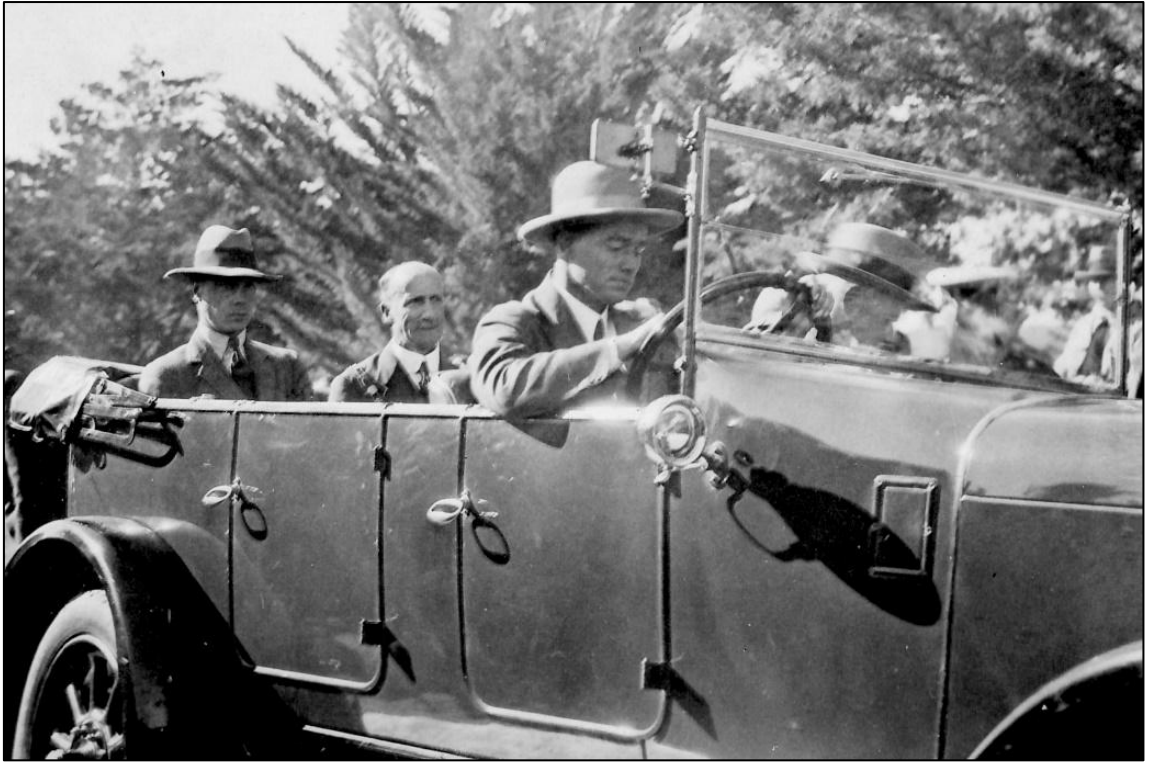


Figure 3: Prince Edward and Mayor Urquhart being driven by Tom Parkes in the "Wheatlands" Austin.

(Graaff-Reinet Museum Collection)



Figure 4: Prince Edward receiving a gift from a "Graaff-Reinet resident" with Mayor Herbert Urquhart and Reverend Paulus Joubert looking on.

(Graaff-Reinet Museum Collection)



Figure 5: Prince Edward speaking to the people of Graaff-Reinet with Reverend Paulus Joubert translating.

(Graaff-Reinet Museum Collection)

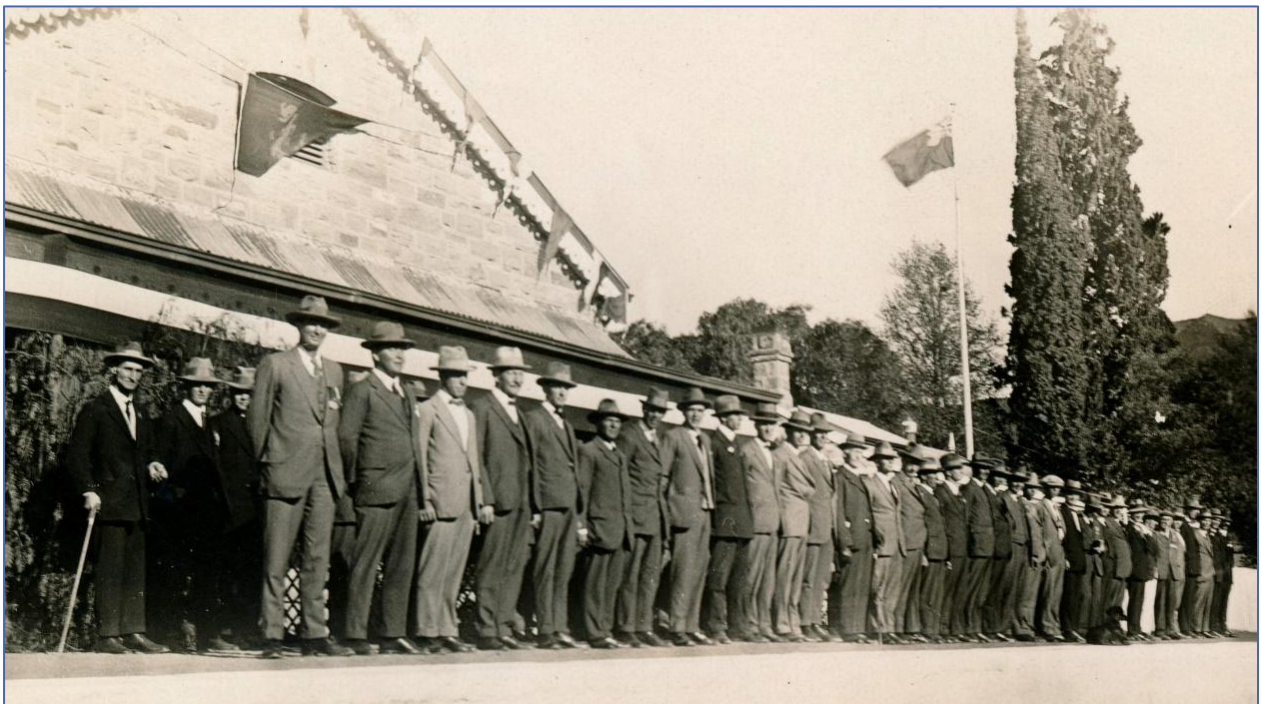


Figure 6: War veterans waiting to meet Prince Edward at the Graaff-Reinet railway station.

(Graaff-Reinet Museum Collection)

For the building of the dam, the South African Railways provided a temporary siding at the construction site, only 400m away from the railway mainline. In the detailed tour schedule, this temporary siding is specifically mentioned which suggests that the Royal Train, on its way to Middelburg, very probably made a very brief stop here to allow the Prince to walk the short distance from the train for an excellent view of the new dam.

A Rest at Grootfontein

Following the Graaff-Reinet visit, the Royal Train continued to Colesberg, arriving well into the evening. The Prince was whisked away to the farm Grootfontein in the Klein-Hantam (between Colesberg and Oorlogspoort to the east of Noupoot). This was one of the prescribed breaks from ceremonial duties mentioned earlier. Grootfontein was one of the many properties in the area owned at the time by Sir Abe Bailey (1864-1940), who hosted the Prince at Grootfontein (Figure 7). Bailey made his money by substantial mining and land transactions in the former Rhodesia and was one of the world's wealthiest men by the 1930s.



Figure 7: Prince Edward in conversation with Sir Abe Bailey at Grootfontein.

*(Copied from photograph in Grootfontein farmhouse,
Johannes Haarhoff)*

In preparation for the Royal visit, an entire new wing was added to the farmhouse at Grootfontein with four bedrooms. The original farmhouse and the “Royal wing” (shown in Figure 8) are still both beautifully preserved in their original states.



Figure 8: The wing on the right of the farmhouse at Grootfontein was purposely built for the Royal visit. (taken in 2018, Johannes Haarhoff)

There are no official records of how these three days were spent. There are two newspaper clippings, one indicating that the time was dedicated to “sport” and the other that “High Royal Highness yesterday enjoyed a shooting trip”.

During the stay at Bailey’s farm, a fine horse named Critic was borrowed from a neighbour Piet Pienaar of the farm Weltevreden for the use of the Prince. According to Pienaar’s descendants, the Prince was so impressed by Critic that it was put on the Pilot Train for the use of the Prince for the duration of the tour before being returned to its Colesberg home (Figure 7).



Figure 7 (a & b): Prince Edward with Piet Pienaar's horse Critic. (supplied by Andre Pienaar of Weltevreden, Colesberg)

On Tuesday 12 May, the Prince returned in the late afternoon to Colesberg for meeting with the community. On his way back to town, he was joined by a horse commando, shown in Figure 8, to lead him into town amidst crowds of onlookers. A full account of the events following was published in a newspaper (reference unknown) and a framed copy of the report hangs from a wall in the Grootfontein farmhouse today. A full transcription of the report is published alongside. Festivities had to be concluded before the Royal Train leaving that evening at 23h00.



Figure 8: The horse commando awaiting Prince Edward to escort him into Colesberg. (Copied from photograph in Grootfontein farmhouse, Johannes Haarhoff)

Impressions of the Tour

At the time, the Royal Tour of 1925 to South Africa had different reviews. The British press, in traditional fashion, painted an extremely rosy picture of the tour. The Cape Town correspondent of the Tasmanian newspaper *The Mercury* wrote breathlessly two days after the visit to Graaff-Reinet:

During the past week, the Prince of Wales has triumphantly toured the southwestern districts and part of the Midlands, coming into close touch with the farming community, whose whole-hearted welcomes provided many inspiring scenes. All sections of the people combined in making the Prince's sojourn the happiest on all occasions, with the result that the tour is doing an immense amount of good in restoring amity. Everywhere there was remarkable keenness to see the Prince, whose custom in mixing freely with the people created the most favourable impression.

At the time, South Africa harboured a strong republican sentiment lingering after the Anglo-Boer and the Rebellion, only 23 and 10 years earlier. It was an objective of the Royal visit to bring about a broader and renewed appreciation of the British connection. Moreover, it was Jan Smuts who had invited the Prince to South Africa in 1923, but a more nationalistic Hertzog government (after winning the 1924 election) who had to host the Prince. In this way, the true views of the Afrikaans media on the Royal visit were muted – more so than if they had been in opposition. Sapire reflected in 2018 on the mixed reaction of the Afrikaner people:

Deference, curiosity, and admiration mingled with lingering war resentment, satire, defiance, and expressions of courtesy that often masked distaste. Responses were also inflected by regional political cultures, generation, gender, and social experience of individuals. This is not always apparent in the fawning English-language media coverage that purveyed images of uniform mass responses in standard journalistic tropes of exultant multitudes.

Nevertheless, in closing, there is no question that the Royal visit brought a great deal of excitement to all South Africans, regardless of language or ideology.

Graaff-Reinet was no exception. The young Prince of Wales impressed all with his exceptional charm, informality and the conscientiousness with which he appeared to conduct his duties. Ralph Deakin, the correspondent of *The Times*, who accompanied the tour, reflected:

The backveld Boer, whenever he had come into the proper range of the Prince's personality ... allowed himself to be stirred and swayed as nobody else in the land could have stirred or swayed him.

Sources and Further Reading

Sapire, Hilary (2018) The Prince and Afrikaners: The Royal Visit of 1925. *Royal Studies Journal* Volume 5 Number 1. Available at <https://rsj.winchester.ac.uk/articles/142/files/submission/proof/142-1-247-1-10-20180530.pdf>

Graaff-Reinet Museum Photographic and Document Collection

Pienaar, Andre (2025) Personal communication

Finally, a “teaser”: Can anyone identify the woman in this enlarged version of Figure 4, other than Prince Edward, Herbert Urquhart and Rev Paulus Joubert? Graaff-Reinet Museum would appreciate your feedback.



*Graaff-Reinet Museum's
open day is getting bigger and better!*



Pop Up Market

DECEMBER 14 |  FROM 09.00 TO 13.00
 REINET HOUSE, PARSONAGE STREET

*Book your space in Reinet House's garden for only
R50! Any stall welcome: second-hand clothing,
books, crafts, accessories, etc.*

Contact Number: 049 8923801

Prehistoric Pathways to our Karoo Origins in Graaff-Reinet



Marina Rubidge

Graaff-Reinet has long held the reputation of a town with a community which preserves its heritage, be it ancient, modern, prehistoric, historical, environmental, geological, theological, architectural. This is attested to by active societies, organisations, and museums, the finest of these being the Graaff-Reinet Museum, which incorporates the Military History Museum, Old Library, Old Residency, Reinet House, Urquhart House. Art Galleries include the Imibala Gallery, The Hester Rupert Gallery and the Jan Rupert Gallery.

It has thus been a great privilege to be involved in the establishment of **Karoo Origins - The Fossil Centre**, which plans to collaborate with all institutions and their efforts to increase tourist numbers, attract researchers (both international and local), and preserve Graaff-Reinet Heritage. The project is the result of a dream of Bruce Rubidge to make the famous Rubidge Fossil collection more accessible to the general public. Completion of the dream was realised through the appointment of the design company Fancy Horse who planned and executed the exhibits. Piet Dekker architects did all the architectural designs to transform two old buildings on the corner of Church and Parsonage streets to be suitable for a paleontological research and exhibition centre. The Polish Way was appointed to undertake all construction work

The process of establishing the Centre, took 3 years and it recently became the first South African project to win the prestigious John J. Lanzendorf-National Geographic PaleoArt Prize. This international award recognizes outstanding achievement in paleontological scientific illustration and naturalistic art. The award acknowledges Fancy Horse Studio's extraordinary ability to bridge the gap between complex scientific research and a compelling public experience.

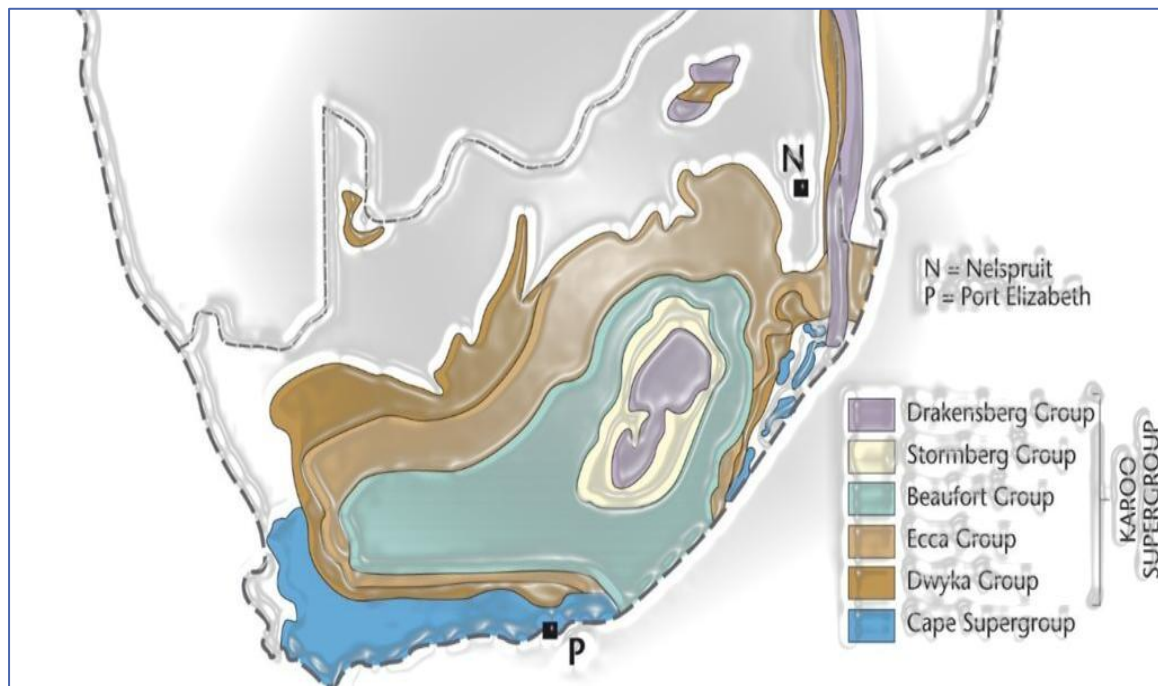


Figure 1. geological map showing the distribution of the rocks of the Karoo Supergroup.

Fancy Horse Studios co-founders, Dianne Makings and Colin Payne collaborated with Bruce Rubidge, immersing themselves in the fossil record of the Karoo Supergroup (Fig 1) — one of Earth's richest windows into prehistoric life — extracting narratives from millennia-old data and transforming dense academic research into an emotionally resonant journey through deep time.

Karoo Origins is built around the renowned Rubidge Fossil Collection which was amassed in the 1930's through the energy and enthusiasm of Sidney Rubidge who farmed at Wellwood. The display showcases the entire collection of which 107 specimens are holotypes, the reference specimen on which a newly discovered species is based. Fossils from this important collection have shaped our understanding of life on Earth during the Permian period, 255 million years ago.

In preparing reconstructions of the animals which once lived in the Graaff-Reinet area, illustrative mock-ups were sent to experts in the field (including scientists from South Africa, the United Kingdom, USA and Russia) for peer review. Using their feedback, the research and the creative talent in South Africa, the exhibit features the most up-to-date reconstruction globally of these Permian creatures.

Apart from the fossils and reconstructions of ancient creatures of the Karoo, the centre features a groundbreaking animated waterhole exhibit (Fig 2), the first of its kind globally, that brings the Permian landscape vividly to life. The filmed scene in the display, which took 18 months to develop, creates the feeling of looking out into the landscape of the Graaff-Reinet area 255 million years ago. The scene runs for a full 6 minutes and 15 seconds, then loops perfectly, creating a seamless experience, featuring 6 species interacting in an accurate environment at a Permian waterhole.

The physical installation is life size – the flesh-eating gorgonopsian appears on screen at 2.9 m long (its actual size). The movements and behaviours of the animals were based on the most recent research into both the ecosystems of the time, and the biomechanics understood from the fossils. Like the extraordinary *Walking with Dinosaurs* show, a variety of modern animals were studied and referenced to understand how the extinct creatures should be depicted in the animation. Fossil trackways, studied alongside the fossilized bones, were used to determine the creature's posture, gait, and how it would have moved.



Figure 2: Animated prehistoric waterhole scene which won the prestigious international John J. Lanzendorf-National Geographic PaleoArt Prize

The studio's approach to the museum combined multiple disciplines: handcrafted sculpture, 2D and 3D animation and immersive installations that blur the boundaries between education and wonder. The result is an exhibition that doesn't just display fossils but transports visitors to the banks of ancient rivers where the earliest ancestors of modern mammals once thrived. By amalgamating the science and facts into animation and sculpture, the displays become relatable, and visitors can enjoy and experience without being overwhelmed.



Figure 3: Some of the displays in the Permian Hall showing fossils and reconstructions of the animals which once inhabited the Graaff-Reinet area

Since opening in April, Karoo Origins has welcomed an average of 1,100 visitors monthly, with numbers expected to reach 2,000 as word spreads of this extraordinary new attraction. The centre not only tells the story of ancient extinctions but connects them to contemporary conservation challenges — making the Karoo's fossil record urgently relevant to today's biodiversity crisis. The Karoo Origins Centre will be open throughout the holiday season, closing only on Christmas and New Year's Day.

The Rubidge Collection itself has a remarkable origin story. In 1934, a 10-year-old girl (Peggy Rubidge) asked her father what fossils were, sparking a family picnic that led to the discovery of a 255-million-year-old skull. That

simple question ignited decades of fossil collecting by the Rubidge family, creating one of South Africa's pioneering paleontological collections.

This Centre honours this fossil collecting legacy while making it accessible to new generations. Through carefully crafted exhibitions, visitors discover that 255 million years ago, during the age of supercontinent Pangaea, Graaff-Reinet stood at the very heart of Earth's connected landmass — making the town, "the hometown of all mammals, including us."

This is indeed a great tribute to the ancient heritage of Graaff-Reinet and all who seek to preserve it to benefit future generations.



To Conclude..



As the year draws to a close, we pause with grateful hearts to thank every visitor, supporter, and friend who has walked alongside us. In a world that often moves too quickly, Christmas invites us to slow down, reflect, and rediscover the quiet magic of community.

This year has not been without its challenges. One of the most significant was the implementation of the recommendations from the Fire Risk Assessment conducted in April 2024. The Museum simply does not have the financial resources—nearly a million rand—to carry out these essential safety requirements. As a result, our buildings are currently not insured against fire, placing our treasured heritage at serious risk. We therefore humbly appeal to the public, partners, and friends of the museum to lend a helping hand as we work toward addressing this urgent and costly need.

Despite these obstacles, the Board and Staff of the Graaff-Reinet Museum remain deeply grateful for your trust, encouragement, and shared love of heritage. Each story told, each artefact admired, and each visit affirms the importance of preserving our past.

May this Christmas bring light to your homes, warmth to your families, and renewed hope for the year ahead. Together, let us continue building a future rooted in connection, compassion, and possibility.

Wishing you a blessed Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

Warm regards,

The Graaff-Reinet Museum Team

