



Rose's

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ROUND-UP

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A JOURNEY OF TASTE TREATS, SURVIVAL AND EMPOWERMENT

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Syddra Essop's cookery book, *Karoo Kitchen*, is set to find a place on the bookshelves of all Karoo lovers. Much, much more than just a recipe book, it pays homage to the Karoo, the rich cultural diversity of the region and its people. A well-illustrated, worthwhile read it is a journey of discovery, survival and empowerment and it does not pull the punches when it comes to isolation, political turmoil, and poverty. The recipes are as varied and interesting as the people of the Karoo. The book includes a wide variety of delicious, traditional dishes, covering everything from afval, venison, ostrich, chicken and lamb to "wilder" taste treats, such as baked porcupine back, caracal and jackal. It also includes a superb collection of diverse delights such as oven roasted Greek leg of lamb, kneidlach (Jewish Matza balls or sour dumplings), ruiani (a Greek nuts and cinnamon cake), askoek (ash cakes), anjera (traditional Somalian pancakes) and an interesting section of old veld remedies. The food is mouthwatering. Just reading the recipes makes the reader hungry. But, it's the wide variety of personal, poignant stories which link the dishes that make reading this book an adventure through time, Karoo history, traditions and culture. Syddra interviewed over 78, mostly self taught cooks and healers, aged between 23 and 95, to acquire these. A range of evocative black and white pictures, tints and screens give the book a nostalgic air. These photographs range from wedding pictures through family groups to ancestral portraits and like all old photographs raise the questions of who, where and when. Each in its own way sets the pace, adds richness and romance to the book. They are interspersed with excellent views of the Karoo and photographs of cooks in their own kitchens or home environments. The book, costs about R450, and is available from most reputable booksellers.

SAN AND KHOISAN EXPLAINED

"San is also not a word the Bushmen use for themselves," states the *Nama Karoo Foundation 2012 Winter newsletter*. "Many still prefer to be called Bushmen." The newsletter also states Khoisan is a collective term used only to refer to similarity in language. "There are no such people," it states.

A GOOD THIRST QUENCHER

The *ghaap* (*Stapelia*) is one of the most interesting plants in the Karoo. It belongs to a series of succulent plants which grow in very dry, stoney places. They have juicy stems and in the driest seasons these afford travellers a means of quenching their thirst, wrote a contributor to *the Cape Monthly Magazine of August, 1877*. “This is such a fascinating plant that Hugh Masson, an assistant at Kew Gardens and an accomplished botanist was sent out to South Africa, at no small cost by the British Government, to collect the plant, study the species and discover its characteristics. He found about 80 different varieties. He in time produced a splendidly illustrated work. When asked what this plant was like, Mr Gibbon, of the Royal Botanical Gardens, simply said: ‘Like itself.’ During his term of office Governor, Sir Henry Barkly, had the finest collection of stapelias ever seen,” states the writer.

BEAUFORT WEST’S OWN MCIVER

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Beaufort West once had its own McIver. In fact, as Alan Edward Roderick McIver discovered, there once was an entire McIver family living there. They were not magician-like, problem solving heroes like their namesake the TV action-adventurer, McGyver. This family came from a long line of engineers. Alan’s grandfather, who lived in Beaufort West towards the turn of the last century was a railway inspector and this linked him to his home country, Scotland, where most of South Africa’s locomotives were built. Alan’s father, Arthur William, a mining engineer, was born in Beaufort West on November 25, 1910, but later moved to the Witwatersrand. There he married Beatrice Mary Myhill, in Florida, in 1935. They had three daughters and Alan. “All men in my father’s family served in the South African Army during WWII. After enlisting in the Transvaal Scottish, my father was seconded to the S A Engineers because of his mining background and experience with explosives. He saw service in Ethiopia, North Africa, and Italy. At the end of war he transferred to the Royal Engineers in Germany to help dispose of unexploded bombs. He was only 38, when he was injured in an underground accident at Randfontein Estates Gold Mine. He died in Randfontein’s Robinson Hospital, on December 2, 1948.” Allan was only four months old at the time.

DESCENDED FROM A LONG LINE OF ENGINEERS

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The McIver family of Beaufort West can trace its lineage back to the early 1600s, the Earls of Seaforth, the Isle of Lewis, the Outer Hebrides and the formation of the Seaforth Highlanders. McIvers also served with distinction in many other equally-famous regiments, including the Royal Scots, the Cameron Highlanders and the Black Watch. Hugh McIver, was awarded a Victoria Cross during WW1. The local branch of the clan came to South Africa in about 1880, and their story is linked to a tapestry of tales of the development of the Karoo and early South Africa, the coming of the rail and the development of the Witwatersrand goldfields. Alan’s grandfather, Robert, joined the railways as a locomotive inspector, shortly after the rail moved into the Karoo. He met and married Ellen Gertrude Redick on November 23, 1899, shortly after the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War. They had six children: Mary Musto, Roderick Redick, Alexander Arthur, Margaret Arthur, Arthur William and Malcolm Victory, who was given this unusual second name because WW1 had just ended when he was born. Ellen’s father Jonathan Hargreaves Redick came to South Africa from Drighlington, Yorkshire and also settled in Beaufort West . (Jonathan died there on September 16,

1888, and is buried in the old cemetery.) Alan's grandfather died in Pretoria, during the 'flu epidemic on July 5, 1919. He was 45 years old. Alan says: "Our 'family of engineers' dates back to 1804. John McIver, was a boat builder, his son Roderick, a journeyman shipwright, his son Roderick, my grandfather, a locomotive inspector, and my dad, Arthur William, a member of the South African and Royal Engineers regiments and mine captain. I am a chemical engineer and my son, Stuart, is an electrical engineer. There, is however, also an interesting sprinkling of artists, writers and geologists in the family."

TRIP TO TOWN COST HIS LIFE

A trip to town to sell farm produce cost frontier farmer John Selby his life in November, 1856. Night overtook him on his journey home, so he outspanned at the side of the road, tied up his oxen and lay down on the ground behind his wagon to sleep. During the night he awoke feeling as if he were choking. He put his hand to his head and found it covered with blood. John then discovered his pillows, blankets, and plaid shooting coat, which he had taken off prior to retiring, were gone. The *S A Commercial Advertiser* of December 2, 1856, stated it appeared as if "some ruffian, had struck the unfortunate man a severe blow on the head, just above his left eye while he slept". The blow must have totally stunned him because he had no recollection of the attack. John inspanned and raced home as fast as he could. He was in severe pain. He went to bed immediately hoping to soon feel better. No one called the doctor because everyone believed "he was just badly shaken up" and would be better in a day or so. This was not to be. He died within a few days and was survived by his wife, Sarah, and nine children. After his death it was found that his skull had been fractured. Sarah, who had been widowed before, later married William Walter Bradley, a widower.

WHAT A SHOCK, NO LITTLE VILLAGES HERE

"Our first journey into the Karoo was one of great disappointment even though before starting we consulted the best maps of the Colony," writes W Prosser in the *Cape Monthly Magazine of August, 1877*. "We imagined names such as Straat, Draai, Constable and Rietfontein indicated small towns and villages along the route. Guess our disenchantment when on nearing these localities we found, instead of a village, a single house, and around that solitary dwelling other no other evidence of life bar fiercely barking dogs. There is not a single village in the whole of the Karoo or Gouph between Worcester and Beaufort West. Farmers squat near fountains paying about one pound a year for the use of four or five thousand morgen of land. On average dwellings are about 15 miles (24 km) apart. People do not elbow one another here and however much inclined neighbours may be to rake up quarrels their ire has time to cool in transit."

INFORMATION 'OOZED' OUT VERY SLOWLY

"The only inhabitants of the Karoo, before construction of the railway line began, were a few farmers and their dependents. The area produced only sheep, goats, oat, hay and corn. Karoo people were little known to people of Colony and at times they were dreaded," wrote W Prosser, in *Cape Monthly Magazine of August, 1877*. "Traffic to the Diamond Fields, and the construction of a better road from the Hex to Buffel's River, made the area better known yet, accurate information oozed out very slowly. Much information was fictitious and conflicting. On the one hand we were

informed that the area was barren, treeless and inhospitable; that it abounded with venomous snakes and scorpions and that up to three years elapsed between rain showers. Jackals were said to carry off the sheep and agriculture was said to be impracticable on account of depredations by baboons and porcupines. Other people claimed it to be as beautiful as a flower garden, abounding with game – deer, hares, wild cats, partridges, korhans, pauws and secretary birds. Some said it was full of wild ostriches that scampered away to distant horizons and springboks with shocking tameness, because “they just stood waiting to be shot.” Some claimed these animals would look straight into the barrels of sportsman’s fowling pieces to see whether it was loaded!”

A PLACE OF TRANSIENT BEAUTY

“There are few parts of the world where nature assumes so many different aspects as in the Karoo,” states W Prosser in *Cape Monthly Magazine of August, 1877*. “Rain can totally transform it from an arid, barren desert, possessing not a single redeeming feature, to a charming garden. We have seen it change in the course of 48 hours and this is simply marvelous. During February and March there is scarcely a single redeeming feature. The land is covered in low stunted barkless Karoo bushes with grey twisted woody stems tipped with scanty feathery tops and decaying scraggy Mesembryanthemums. They grow a few feet apart and cover the veld as far as the eye can see. The soil between the bushes is so dry and hard that all the lesser plants are parched, showing almost not a vestige of life. With the slightest breeze clouds of dust arise choking the traveller and filling his eyes, ears, and pockets with sand. All is discomfort, everywhere is discomfort. The place is bare, of beauty there is none. But with a few rain showers the most magical change comes over the whole scene withered bushes bud, the soil between then is covered with flowers, the desert blossoms not just over a small tract, but for hundreds of square miles. The beauty, however, is transient. Cold and wet causes the flowerets to close leaving only poor, thin, grey stems. The magic returns with the sunshine. Bright petals reappear and a flowery mantle of marvelous beauty unfolds.

PASSAGE TO ENGLAND

The Cape Frontier Times of March 25, 1851 stated that the cost of a passage to England was 50 guineas for a chief cabin and 40 for a fore cabin. This did not include wines or spirits. These had to be purchased on board as passengers were not allowed to bring own liquid refreshments on to the ship. Each cabin contained two berths, so fares were for “half a cabin, i.e. one berth, including towels and linen.” The newspaper advised single passengers to arrange with a friend beforehand, to share a cabin, “to make matters agreeable.”

PEOPLE OF A BETTER CLASS

Soon after arrival in South Africa Governor Earl Macartney sent his secretary, John Barrow, to Graaff-Reinet with Magistrate Bresler. Barrow visited the Xhosa and “some men who had absconded or been discharged from the Dutch Army”. They were being encouraged to stay in the area of the Fish River. He reported his talks had been successful, but that he had not been able to persuade the Bushmen to quit their wild and marauding ways, nor to convince them of the good intentions of the British Government. Barrow reported that the Boers appeared to be of a better class of people than those towards coast. These “Christian inhabitants”- the Boers of the Snow Mountains (Sneeuberg) -

were a peaceable, obliging, and orderly, brave and hardy, he said. He also reported that in 1787 - 88 some Xhosas had migrated towards the Orange River, but had been driven back to the Praamberg and Schutfontein areas of the Beaufort district.

CARVED HIS WAY INTO HISTORY

At the turn of the last century a Scottish stone mason, James Wright, roamed the Williston area carving gravestones to earn a living. A young village boy, Cornelius de Waal, became so intrigued with James's craft that, according to locals, James taught him the art of stone carving. Cornelius was a lank, wiry, lad, a bit of a loner. He had a steady hand and the courage was needed for carving stone. Also, he had been taught the basics of reading and writing by his mother and so could thus diligently copy written briefs given to him by his clients. Sadly they too often had only minimal education and this led to several spelling mistakes being carved into the memorials. It was not easy work, but he was an excellent craftsman with just the right artistic flair. First of all he had to find "just the right piece of sandstone" and this meant that he and his wife Alie, travelled far and wide in their wagon looking for a suitable piece of the right size. Once he found what he was looking for, he would bore holes all around the stone and jam wet wooden sticks into these. He kept the sticks wet until they swelled sufficiently to break free the selected piece of stone. Then he then loaded it onto a donkey cart and transported it to the graveside where he would spend from six to nine months smoothing it, carving sprays of flowers into it and painstakingly chiselling in the inscription. Cornelius soon discovered this kind of stone masonry was not for the nervous. If the stone cracked he simply had to start over. One the best examples of Cornelius's work is in the Williston Museum. Soon after he finished it he found his clients had disappeared. Cornelius earned £1 a month doing this job.

TOP 'STONE MAN' ONCE WORKED IN SOUTH AFRICA.

John Hay, one of the pioneers of the granite industry of the United States, once worked for a while in the Karoo. Born in Peterhead, Scotland, in 1872, he was apprenticed to the Great North Scotland Granite Company "as soon as he was able to competently hold a chisel". John spent two years learning to polish stone and four years training to become a stonecutter. After that he worked four years as a journeyman before coming to South Africa where he worked for seven years. He then returned to Scotland, but could not settle, so set sail for the United States where he worked for several top companies until he and Peter Blackhall, formed Blackhall & Hay. When Peter died in 1911, John continued in the business employing ten top men and creating some extremely fine monuments.

OCTOBER DATES TO DIARISE

4 - 6 : 10th **Annual Heritage Symposium**, Paarl. Contact: Cathy Raymond heritage@iafrica.com

5 - 7 : 3rd **Vanderkloof Waterfees** – info www.vanderkloofdam.co.za

8 - 11 : **AZEF Worcester** Contact: Wendy Paisley, azef.sa@gmail.com Tel 021 424 3995, Fax: 086 759 2859 Cell: 072 625 0274,

14 - 17 : 2nd **Karoo Development Conf.** Beaufort West. Contact Anita Harmse - HarmseA@ufs.ac.za - Tel 051 401 3812

25 - 27 : **Richmond Book Fair** - Tel No 053 693 0665 - www.richmondnc.co.za

30 – 31 : 3rd Annual Diamond Route Research Conference, De Beers Johannesburg Campus – contact Duncan MacFadyen, Manager: Research and Conservation, Tel No 011 274 2184; Fax 011 274 2185; Cell: 083 379 2139 - www.diamondroute.co.za

I remember things the way they should have been - Truman Capote