

Cape Leopard Trust Environmental Camp – Matjiesrivier Nature Reserve, Cederberg

Imagining

The site was perfect and my imagination roamed between the poplar trees, rustled through fallen leaves...a distant chatter and laughter of children to come...sandy paths winding to surprising bathrooms...a fire burning, the light reflecting on the leaves above...a shelter from the rain and sun...reeds creating spaces...bucket showers on pulleys...a shake of curiosity and a stir of peace...

Building

Once all were agreed on the plans and with the permission and full support of Cape Nature to build the campsite on Matjiesrivier Nature Reserve, the very first step was having the Wendy House put up – this has a division down the centre and would act as kitchen and storeroom.



For some time the Wendy House stood alone on the site, while details were clarified and I gathered quotes and sourced appropriate materials. Finally, in the beginning of October, building started in earnest. Local builders were employed and they started on the shower block which required the most structural work.

I had never been involved in a building project before and certainly not one conducted in Afrikaans. I braved the shops with a list of words which had very little meaning to me. I frequently had the experience, 'Oh, is that what a looks like! What is it used for?' Any remotely technical questions had me phoning Quinton who was trying to focus on his PHD. Then there was the ever present challenge of the distance from Matjiesrivier to any shops, and how do you transport tons of cement blocks without paying huge amounts of money to transporters? Fortunately Baseline, who were working on the Cederberg roads at the time, willingly did two loads for us to get us going.



Kaap Agri Clanwilliam agreed to help us out as much as possible through excellent discounts and gifts of extra materials as well as plenty of advice. I became a regular.

In the trees in the campsite a building started to emerge. Each day saw a change - the walls grew...



the shower cubicles took shape...



the skeleton of the roof appeared...



Soon the roof was covered and the fiddly parts began – making basins, plumbing and fixing the canvas walls. We wanted to use bucket showers, both to conserve energy and to give the children a feeling for water use. We decided that the taps would be put in at knee-level (perfect for washing feet), where the bucket would be filled and then raised with a pulley system. The first time we tried it we ended in stitches as Willem was hoisted to the ceiling while the bucket stayed tauntingly stationary! Evidently something was the wrong way around. Our solution – “phone-a-friend”. Neil, from PR Renovations stopped his pick-up on the highway to draw the pulley system in the city dirt on the side of his vehicle. Jackpot – so that’s how the Z-system works to hoist heavy objects.



Willem working hard



Making the basin base



First attempt at shower

While all this was happening, other parts of the campsite were also developing. Rika, from Cape Nature, had the braai area revamped, creating a perfect space for groups to gather in around a fire.



The “Wendy” was varnished a shade darker and a long overhang was extended from it.



The toilets are a story in their own right:

It was decided that we must use dry “Enviro” loos at the campsite. This was both a simple solution and a water-saving one. On Cape Nature’s recommendation I contacted Enviro-Options about their enviro-loos. They were very interested in the project and offered to sponsor four of their larger enviro-loos. The only hitch was that they were in Johannesburg. Determined not to undermine their brilliant offer, I set about, over the next few weeks, finding a way for the toilets to reach the Cederberg. Kings Transport sponsored the first leg to Cape Town and kindly kept the loos in their storeroom until we found Cederberg Transport willing to help us with the Cape Town to Clanwilliam leg. The toilets then stood at Kaap Agri until we finally decided to get the toilets and various other materials transported on a truck at a good discount with JP Transport. We were horrified when the truck arrived without the enviro-loos – miscommunication while

loading. A few days later JP made sure that the loos were brought up to the Cederberg with one of Dwarsrivier's loads. The next morning we were surprised to see our adventurous enviro-loos on a trailer pulled by an ancient Dwarsrivier tractor! They had eventually arrived, over a month since their first departure and were thankfully intact.



The first cries of the children at the camps have been, "Its long-drops!" I suppose they are in a way, but unlike long-drops, these toilets dry out the contents, which can then be used for compost. They also miraculously don't seem to stink. By the end of a camp, you know they can't be too bad when you get the following comment from a fastidious teenage girl, "GO LONG DROPS! Dis cool, die bucket storte en longdrops maak dit 'n KAMP!"



Decorating

Meanwhile, the shower block was now a space that could be entered, but still, it was only a bare shell. There were toilets, but no floors. Door frames but no doors. There were bare buildings with no paths or friendly splashes of colour. Children from the Stellenbosch Waldorf School and Dwarsrivier Primary collected river pebbles and did beautiful mosaics around the basins.



The finishing touches (so many finishing touches) took a team of wonderful friends, brothers, trustees and colleagues, with the camp only days away, who threw their backs into it. I enjoyed shaping the basins, working with concrete like it was clay.



*Quinton painting
making doors*



Me painting



Bill and Charles

Finally the campsite was complete and the space could be occupied. How did I feel? Elated. Exhausted. Satisfied.



Thanks

It is gratifying how many people have been inspired by this project and given their backing in whatever way they were able. It goes without saying that all of this support has been crucial in turning an idea into a reality.

My sincere thanks go to the following people and organisations:

Cape Nature for forming a solid partnership with The Cape Leopard Trust, allowing the campsite to be built at Matjiesrivier and giving us access to land for educational purposes

The Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust, managed by BoE Private Clients, for its incredible financial support of the CLT Education Project

Enviro-Options, in particular *Mark La Trobe* and *Len Parsons* for donating the Enviro-loos and giving excellent backup and advice

Kings Transport for transporting the Enviro-loos

Cederberg Transport, in particular *Henry Williams*, for transporting the Enviro-loos

Baseline, for transporting the cement blocks

Midas Earthcote for donating the paint for the shower block

Neil of PR Renovations for donating the washing-up sink and for the advice

Kaap Agri Clanwilliam, in particular *Christie Windell*, for donating some building materials and giving us generous discounts on the rest

Rudolf Andrag, for arranging and contributing towards the water pump

Johan van der Westhuizen, for the reeds, as well as the use of equipment

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Dew Hot, for the geysers

Eddlesgas, for gas equipment and advice

Ceder Brick and Block, for cement blocks

Cristies Sport, for tents

And to the following people:

Rika du Plessis, Matjiesrivier reserve manager, for her help and input

Charles, Alpa and **Bill**, for getting stuck in and making it happen

The children of **Dwarsrivier Primary** and **Stellenbosch Waldorf School** who did the mosaics

Gareth Mann, for unexpected labours

Willem, for hours of hard work and dedication

Quinton, for sharing the vision and the tough reality, and for always finding a solution

Finally, thank you to all those unnamed people who have offered advice and followed the progression of the building of the campsite with interest and encouragement.