

The background image is a photograph of a Karoo landscape. In the foreground, there is a field of dry, yellowish-brown shrubs. In the middle ground, a small white house with a dark roof and a chimney is visible. Behind the house, a dark, rounded hill rises. On top of the hill, several wind turbines are visible against a blue sky with large, white, fluffy clouds. The overall scene is a mix of natural and man-made elements in a semi-arid environment.

Dateline Africa

# Karoo Diary

## 1 September to 30 November

### 2025

A selection of events about, and from across, the Karoo that are significant or interesting, or both. Compiled by the New Agenda Editorial Collective at the Institute for African Alternatives and the Guest Editor.

Photo: Stephanie Paula Borchardt

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## November

**4 November:** An exhibit housed at Karoo Origins: The Fossil Centre, in Graaff-Reinet, won an international art/science award for a computer-generated graphic animation of life at a local waterhole 255 million years ago – before the age of dinosaurs. The John J. Lanzendorf-National Geographic PaleoArt Prize for Digital Modeling and Animation honours artists and studios whose work on the deep past bridges the gap between scientific accuracy and creative expression. Karoo Origins is a palaeontological research, exhibition and public outreach centre that presents the rich fossil record of the area.



*Pre-historic Karoo: The computer-generated animation depicting life at a waterhole in the Permian period, when mammal ancestors called therapsids dominated the land. This exhibit was produced by Fancy Horse Studios.*

*IFAA thanks Fancy Horse Studios for permission to use this photo.*

*Visit: <https://fossilcentre.co.za>*

## October

**31 October:** Police arrested seven men and three women suspected of involvement in an extortion syndicate. At a community meeting in Murraysburg hosted by a wind energy construction company organisers were confronted by a group threatening violence against company staff unless they were paid off. They also threatened to set trucks alight to prevent them transporting wind turbine components to the construction site.





**12 October:** The business website, *Currency News*, carried a detailed article promoting luxury conservation-driven tourism in the Karoo. Need to escape real life? “Off grid elegant simplicity” costs R25,290 per night in the least luxurious suite if you have no friends and go alone. If you really want to splash out and treat the family of four to a night dedicated to nature conservation, expect to pay R70,000. You can arrive in your private plane, or they will fetch you from Gqeberha in the Eastern Cape. Samara Karoo Reserve, sprawling over 67,000 acres, most of it reclaimed farmland, ensures that “guests actively contribute to the ongoing restoration and preservation of the Great Karoo’s unique biodiversity, ensuring its magic endures for future generations.”



*Luxury in the Karoo for the privileged few.*

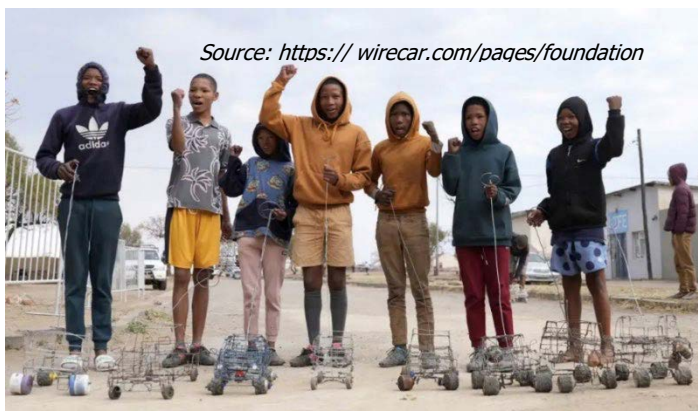
*Source: <https://www.samara.co.za/>*

**9 October:** Students and protesters burned down buildings and destroyed research resources at the University of Fort Hare on the edge of the Karoo. Criminal syndicates have inserted themselves into the procurement chains to loot the state-funded institution. The corruption has affected local business owners (including taxis) and politically-protected criminals. Physical damage to the university – founded over a century ago as a college for Blacks – amounted to over US\$20 million. Alumni of Fort Hare include Kenneth Kaunda, Seretse Khama, Julius Nyerere, Robert Mugabe, Joshua Nkomo as well as many South Africans. Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo met at Fort Hare and the ANC Youth League was founded there.



## September

**25 September:** An entirely green and renewable-energy event on the motor calendar, the annual Philipstown Wire Car Grand Prix, was held in this small remote town in the Karoo. The drivers, local children, run behind their hand-made wire race vehicles, guiding them over rough dirt roads that are the race track. This is the 14<sup>th</sup> annual Grand Prix and competition was fierce, drawing a crowd of over 500 people on the day, which is extraordinary in a town of less than 1,000 residents. One champion driver has won the Grand Prix six times.



**24 September:** A “one-day only exhibition” was held at Losberg in the heart of the Karoo for 120 guests who were in South Africa for the third G20 Research and Innovation Ministerial Meeting. The venue was the site of the MeerKAT, the frontrunner to the much more powerful Square Kilometre Array (SKA) radio telescope, which is being built as part of a multi-billion-dollar international scientific project “to probe the very depths of the cosmos”. Four years into the ten-year construction period, South Africa – which won an international bid and donated the land for the telescope – has now established itself as a global leader in the world radio astronomy community. Government legislation enforces a huge ‘radio quiet area’ across the region where no modern electrical



sources are allowed in case they damage the powerful highly sensitive telescope.



**22 September:** Police arrested two foreign nationals, aged 36 and 42, on a dusty roadside near Port Nolloth, after they found a haul of illegal flora, destined for sale on the black market, carefully stashed away in their white Toyota Hilux. The *Diamond Fields Advertiser* said "...what these men were trying to steal wasn't just plants. It was part of the Northern Cape and South Africa's living heritage – and they were treating it like loot." The Succulent Karoo, the most biodiverse arid region on the planet, is home to more than 6,000 plant species, over 40% of which are found nowhere else. These plants have survived for centuries in one of the world's harshest environments, evolving into strange, beautiful, often tiny lifeforms – some shaped like pebbles, others like thumb tips or miniature stars. Ravaged by demand from overseas collectors, some species – like *Clivia Mirabilis*, *Conophytum* and others – are now classified as critically endangered. Between 2019 and 2024, more than 1.6 million illegally harvested succulents were seized by South African authorities. Most never survive long enough to be returned to the wild.



**17 September:** A copper-zinc mine near Prieska, closed since 1991, is likely to re-open after its new owners, Orion Minerals, an Australia-based junior mining company, announced a probable funding deal with Glencore. Calling it “a watershed moment,” the investment will start producing copper from December 2026. The project is 30% owned by historically disadvantaged South Africans in terms of the Black economic empowerment policy of the government. This includes a 5% share for the approximately 1,000 mine employees, and a 5% share for a community trust. The mining is planned to last for 13 years – based on present mineral price trends and known characteristics of the ore body.

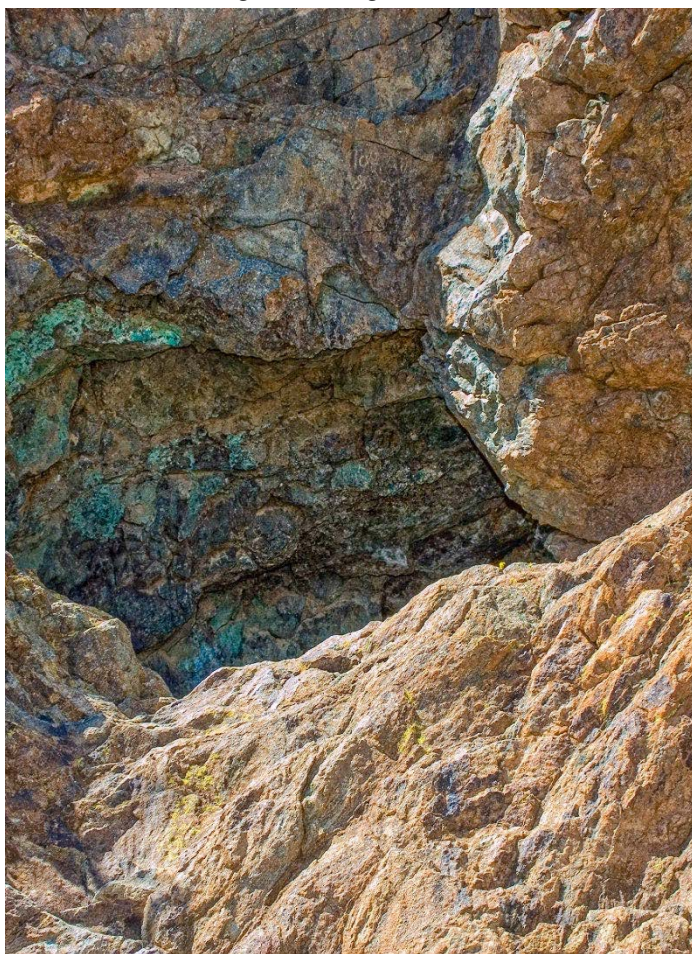
**9 September:** International Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Day provided an opportunity to reflect on the bleak statistic that risky drinking among pregnant women is ten times higher in the Northern Cape than in the rest of South Africa. Babies who are exposed to alcohol in the womb can experience severe learning disabilities as children. The Foundation for Alcohol Related Research (FARR), a non-profit agency that has long provided awareness information to discourage drinking during pregnancy, had to close down in the Karoo towns of Hanover, Petrusville and Philipstown in 2025 due to lack of funding.



**International FASD Awareness Day - 9 Sept**



2 September: “Acceleration towards production” was the title of a presentation on two separate Karoo copper mining projects, which aimed to entice investors attending the Africa Down Under annual conference to put up their money. The mines in Prieska and Okiep were closed between 20 and 30 years ago when shallower reserves were depleted and weak mineral prices made it uneconomical to access the deeper ore bodies. Now growing demand for critical minerals and improved mining techniques have made the mines viable again. At what cost to the communities living there though?



*Entrance to Simon van der Stel copper mine, near Okiep, Namaqualand.*

*Photo: Grobler du Preez, Shutterstock*