

THE BEAUTY OF CONSERVATION

If you were at Beaverlac campsite at the end of April, you might have seen some gorgeous girls behind the wheels of explore4knowledge's dirt-covered Land Rovers. These beauties were there for a weekend focused on understanding the impact our daily lives can have on our water sources and environment.



Janine Avery joined explore4knowledge in the Cederberg as it hosted Miss Earth SA for its first-ever Earth Camp to learn about water conservation in the field



As the Cederberg Mountain range bends and folds, emerging from the dusty farmlands that surround it, a number of spider-legged river systems cut through the iconic orange-hued rock faces, forming what I like to call "Valleys of Happiness". Here, where wind-beaten mountainside gives way to rivers, you find

pockets of pure bliss with shimmering rock pools, cascading waterfalls, flat winding rivers, totem pole-like rock formations, and endless caves and rock paintings just waiting to be explored. It was one of these valleys to which I headed recently to participate in an explore4knowledge award-winning Water Action Weekend

with the contestants and previous winners of Miss Earth South Africa. Water Action Weekend is a registered programme managed and funded by sponsors, under which the Earth Camp concept—specifically designed for Miss Earth—falls.

Led by John Lucas of explore4knowledge, a proud Cape Union Mart Ambassador, we



OPPOSITE PAGE: Proudly sponsored by Land Rover N1 City, explore4knowledge's convoy of Discovery 4s makes its way into the southern Cederberg

THIS PAGE: While Lucas sets up the drone to capture stills of the catchment area, Ilzé Saunders-Buys (Miss Earth SA 2014) and Catherine Constantinides (director of Miss Earth SA) take the opportunity to pose atop the bonnet of the Educational Expeditions Range Rover Vogue

spent the weekend off the beaten trail carved by the Rattle River where many go to frolic by the rock pools. We, however, made our way into the private nature reserve that sits on the Beaverlac property and which is normally only reachable on foot. Lucas had organised a special permit for the weekend, and we bumped and ground our way along

in our 4x4s sponsored by Land Rover N1 City, following the path of the Olifants River. When we reached a river crossing, it was time for the girls of Miss Earth South Africa to kick off their shoes and roll up their sleeves for some life lessons about water and this exquisite valley in which we found ourselves.

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In the hours that followed, I saw magnificent ladies dissolve into playful children with a miniSASS (Stream Assessment Scoring System) activity that saw us wading through the coffee-coloured liquid of the Olifants in search of whatever insects we could find. With the help of a simple chart system, we were quickly able to equate the insects we

women to make a real, impactful difference in their communities through environmental initiatives. Their campaign, #WasteStopsWithMe, has been at the forefront of their mind for the last two years and encourages everyone to be a conscious citizen, aware of our carbon footprints. They aim to engage communities in active clean-ups and

introduced us to the world of seafood, sustainable fishing and *moerkoffie*. As a WWF SASSI ambassador, Grundlingh is a shining example of the programme that aims to create sustainable awareness in consumers regarding seafood. As he created dish after delicious dish on the fire (from spinach and feta braai pies to homemade *potbrood* and malva pudding),



found in the river with a score that indicated how healthy the river was. This is important information that explore4knowledge feeds back as part of a citizen science initiative, leading to a better understanding of South Africa's waterways. After learning about how indiscriminate farming, pollution and misuse of our precious water systems are harming the health of our rivers, these valleys of happiness didn't look so vibrant anymore. With waste entering our river systems at an alarming rate, and with the water situation in the Cape as dire as it is, we suddenly understood the effect each little choice we make in our daily lives can have on the environment.

And it's this notion—that each of us can make a difference—that has been the driving force behind Miss Earth South Africa. Don't be fooled by the name or by the stunning good looks of the girls. Miss Earth is far from a beauty pageant; you won't find swimwear competitions or talent shows here. Miss Earth is a leadership programme that's empowering young



workshops, and the weekend in the Cederberg gave the girls the building blocks they needed to take the message far and wide.

Back at camp, and seated around a roaring fire, John Grundlingh—who makes up one half of Weskus ANNAS, the duo that won the 2015 Ultimate Braai Master title—

CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: Overlooking one of the rock pools, Lucas explained the importance of rock formations as 'bass barriers' and maintaining indigenous fish species populations; Water does not come from a tap! The Miss Earth ladies join Lucas in drinking directly from the stream; Without the support of Land Rover N1 City, it would not have been possible for explore4knowledge to reach 15 000 kids across the wilderness of southern Africa since 2013

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CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: Nolo and Ilzé enthusiastically navigating the gravel, sand and mud sections of the Olifants River low-water crossing, collecting insects to determine river health through miniSASS; Jumping for joy after navigating mountain passes behind the wheel of a Land Rover for the first time in their lives; Thank you to everyone who made this weekend possible, and to the ladies of Miss Earth for allowing explore4knowledge to host them on its Earth Camp

he regaled us with tales of sustainable fishing and proudly served up tuna that he had caught with his own two hands.

But the cherry on top was learning some old expedition tricks from Lucas, such as how a few blazing coals thrown casually into an aluminium pot filled with coffee and boiling water can act like a filter—ensuring

the plunger is no longer a necessary item on the list of camping equipment!

Then it was time for a sunset hike up to the waterfall where a few of us jumped and squealed into the cool waters below, while others marvelled at the wetland system that's so often taken for granted in our modern lives. Lucas continued his weekend of water education, explaining how wetlands act as natural catchment areas for pollution and chemicals in river systems—but man's desire to build over them, turn them into space for orchards or redirect the rivers for use in farming and industry is more harmful to the entire ecosystem than we could ever imagine.

As the Cederberg turned ablaze with the setting sun, we were each left to our own thoughts; a weekend of fun and adventure made us realise just how big a footprint we all leave behind. ☺

For further details, visit www.explore4knowledge.com, www.educationalexpeditions.co.za and www.missearths.co.za.