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# AFRICAN STORYBOOK

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## One Tar Road...

The Eastern Cape 19<sup>th</sup> century village of Bedford has a lot of 'charming' going for it. One tar road, beautiful colonial architecture, the odd stone church, an eccentric antique trader, a coffee shop and a mountain. Populated as it is by city refugees and creative types, it has its fair share of guesthouses and B'nBs - but on a recent visit I stayed outside the village, at a suitably named 'country house' called Cavers. A little digging through the website suggested it promised character, cable TV and good food.

Thirteen kms down the Adelaide road, Ken and Rozanne Ross run a dairy farm, as Ken's forefathers did before him. The descendent of a Scottish pastor who came out to the South African colony with that explorer and missionary extraordinaire, David Livingstone, Ken has with Rozanne established Cavers Country House in the original homestead, a suitably weathered, magnificent stone mansion (*let it be known here that Ken is with his cows from first light, while Rozanne sees to her four-star guest-house*).

On leaving the tar, eight km's down the dirt road to the Cavers gate I admit I got to worrying about missing the relative atmosphere and tranquility of the little village. Behind this big hill and that and around a couple of bends, I was thinking that - as I'd forgotten my book at home, a great Deon Meyer read btw - this could be a bit remote, even a little ...lonely?

*I was thinking this could be a little remote, even a little ...lonely?*





*Refugees from the city move in and create colour, although on this occasion the owner wasn't sure what to do with it.*



*Colourful personality. Goliath (pr. Gooliat), waiter at Die Padstal in Bedford, with colleagues. Excellent chicken pies.*

Well it wasn't, as between the TV, a retired traveling German couple and a braai / barbeque with Ken and Rozanne, my two evenings were well taken care of. In fact - with apologies to my mother - I can't remember eating so well from a TV tray (*lamb, green beans and sweet potato from the garden and a glass of crisp dry white*). The long table beneath the chandelier in the dining room would have to wait for an occasion on which I could bring my significant other.

Cavers is known for its magnificent, sprawling gardens (*featured during the October Bedford Flower Festival*), but the most I got to see of it was in the late, dim moonlight when searching for cell-phone signal near the Ross' house. With African wood-hoopoes and the soulful call of the emerald-spotted dove criss-crossing the bountiful garden the next morning, I believe I had found rural bliss.

At Cavers I discovered silence rarely found, a spooky staircase, a brief history lesson and Rozanne's fabulous cooking. All wrapped in mountains and neighbouring farms still owned - just like Cavers - by the descendents of the Scottish settlers who built them.

Bedford itself is a thing of quiet dirt roads and beauty that easily qualifies for postcard status. Which I gather is pretty much the reason a group of Scots among the 1820 Settlers decided to settle here, at the foot of a mountain known as the *Bosberg* in Afrikaans.

By geographical definition the surrounding landscape offers some compelling drives, leading the traveller through varying degrees of rolling green and spectacular arid - the Great Fish river valley and less-travelled roads to Tarkastad and Queenstown among them. West around the relative corner is the big-sky Karoo of Cradock and Graaf-Reinet.

Most such attractions have to be searched out, and places like Bedford will never attract the hordes, like Dullstroom and Greyton, odes to commerce as they are. Simply because it is more on the way to somewhere than a destination in itself. But perhaps therein lies its attraction. As with its interesting people.

Like Goliath (Afrikaans pronunciation), the camp Xhosa waiter at the corner *Padstal* coffee-shop. Or the wiry antique trader always keen to bargain. Or the gay strawberry farmer from the big city, suitably precious about when he serves coffee at his Osteria and serious about serving good food.

Whether Rozanne's haute cuisine, or the chicken-pie at the *Padstal*, Bedford will always have someone offering the sort of convivial and gastronomic touch that has become such an oddly essential part of our 21st century life.

Enticing travellers for a taste of a place that's cute but not too fussy.



*Its roots may be in Scotland, yet Cavers Country House is as close to an English country mansion as it gets. Remote and rural, the region is outdoor heaven.*