

# Be a happy camper in the Free State



A sandstone rock face looms high above 14 luxury-fitted canvas tents.

**H**OUSEKEEPER Mamorena Motsoari's flashing smile, a super moon viewed from a steaming outdoor bath against a rock face, the skirl of bagpipes – just a few wish-you-were-here memory mementoes from my visit to The Prynnsberg Estate in the eastern Free State, a few kilometres from Lesotho and in the lee of the Maluti mountains.

Colonialism has its pluses, especially when travelling. At Prynnsberg the combination of that and camping results in the very best glamping (glamorous camping).

Diamond magnate Charles Newberry created The Prynnsberg Estate in 1881 in pursuit of his romantic dream of a classic English-style country estate in a corner of Africa.

It is now owned by the Melvills of old missionary stock.

Gentlefolk in the truest sense, Rick and Sue are of Melvill and Moon fame-bespoke 4x4/camping/excursion must-haves, so when they do glamping they do it right.

They didn't buy tents, they made their own. The spot they chose was not of their making, however.

A sandstone rock face looms

## A chance to take in the 'stunners of the province while glamping it up, writes Adrian Rorvik

high above a long, gentle slope dotted with 14 canvas tents with wooden floors, Persian carpets, Melvill & Moon campaign furnishings and beds with crisp linen. Insulated with fly sheets, they have roll-up sides to allow a through breeze in hot weather.

The Bushmen, campers par excellence, chose the site first.

The rock face runs behind the tents, the toilets and showers, open-air washbasins and elevated bath platform, then turns to the glamping site's deck and bohemian lounge under a huge overhang, blackened by centuries of home fires, that keeps it cool in summer and warm in winter and protects it from wind and rain.

The eclectic furniture includes daybeds, campaign chairs, a bar and various collectables lit by gas, oil lamps, candles and a fire pit, the perimeter fringed with fairy lights.

Too, too charming! Cooking gear includes an enormous Boer war troop train cooking pot and there's a generator in case the sound system needs cranking up

with room aplenty for a knees-up.

The quaintly elegant ablutions have black and white tiles, framed pictures, flush loos and hot showers.

An ingenious, attractive "donkey boiler" supplies hot water and the bath platform is marvellous, with four Victorian baths open to the stars and each other.

Prynnsberg was South Africa's first private game farm. If you (mistakenly) think that glamping is not your thing, you could try spacious, two-bedroom Aran, built for the original estate gamekeeper in 1886 and beautifully restored and decorated.

The historical heart of the estate is Prynnsberg Manor.

Described as "the jewel of the Free State", the elaborate 2 000m<sup>2</sup>, 22-room sandstone mansion is cur-

rently enjoying major renovations and reopens in May.

It is full of history. Rudyard Kipling stayed during the Christmas of 1900 and painted a Noah's Ark frieze in the children's playroom.

Other signatures in the visitors' book from that era include the Duke of Westminster and President MT Steyn.

It is one of 20 private houses featured in Remarkable Heritage Houses of South Africa, has featured on *Top Billing* and is usually booked for sumptuous country weddings.

Happily there is a lovely church, complete with pipe organ, a little way off.

The workshop near the church is a hive of activity, with their window creating resident-master carpenter and much, much more – when not acting as your bagpipe toting/tooting alarm clock.

Once awake, and after a hearty

breakfast, you could just chill, ramble about the 1 200 hectare lands or, as wedding guests do, use the polo field below for cricket, bicycle polo, archery or clay pigeon shooting.

Guests are most welcome to lend a hand with the herd of cattle, or the blesbok herd.

I took in more Free State "stunners" en route to sampling cherries and development polo, though there are happenings throughout the year, such as the Stars of Sandstone Steam and Heritage Festival at the end of March. The festival features narrow gauge locomotives of yesteryear, historic aircraft and more than 300 vintage tractors, among others.

I'd love to rustle up some company to savour the glamp-site in time for that.

● For more information, call 082 441 9137/051 943 7186 and see [www.prynnsberg.co.za](http://www.prynnsberg.co.za)



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