

# Trekbokke Touring Exhibition Project

## Background

Springbok (*Antidorcus marsupialis*; {Zimmerman, 1780}) is the national symbol of South Africa. It is a unique species, native to the Karoo and which was once present across South Africa, Namibia and Botswana. The records of early European explorers indicate that springbok populations were particularly extensive in the Karoo regions of the modern Northern Cape and Free State.

As early as the C18<sup>th</sup> the French ornithologist Francois Levillant noted that springbok numbers would at times multiply prodigiously. A phenomenon referred to as the Trekbokke<sup>1</sup>.

Trekbokke events were recorded in the Karoo during the C18<sup>th</sup> to early C20<sup>th</sup> and described at times as featuring up to a million animals stretching over vast kilometres. Making the Trekbokke one of the natural wonders of the world.

Today due to changes in land-use the Trekbokke is at best a memory and as a heritage of South Africa and the Karoo in particular is a little known event.

The Nama-Karoo Foundation<sup>2</sup> is exploring ways to further the introduction of the springbok, replacing sheep as the natural grazer, in the Northern Cape and Free State. It is hoped that by working with farmers and communities to re-instate ecosystem the Trekbokke phenomenon might one day return to the Karoo.

## Exhibition

As part of the work toward the reintroduction of large springbok populations in the Karoo a programme of education and awareness is being developed that would use the history of the Trekbokke as a vehicle to raise and explore issues surrounding re-stocking.

Despite the history of the Trekbokke the phenomenon is little known amongst those who live in the Karoo today. Trekbokke is not taught about in schools, nor does it feature in textbooks, or local museums. Some research on the subject has been done, chiefly by Chris Roche a summary of whose work can be found on the Nama-Karoo Foundation website<sup>3</sup>.

In order to widen public knowledge of and debate about the Trekbokke the Touring Exhibition Project proposes to create a series of panels, educational literature, and artwork that will travel across the Northern Cape and Free State mimicking the historic springbok treks. The touring exhibition will depict the natural history of the springbok and the trekbokke, past and present

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<sup>1</sup> For a fuller explanation of the Trekbokke see [http://www.namakaroo.com/springbok\\_treks.htm](http://www.namakaroo.com/springbok_treks.htm)

<sup>2</sup> see <http://www.namakaroo.com/>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.namakaroo.com/springbok\\_treks.htm](http://www.namakaroo.com/springbok_treks.htm)

perceptions of springbok, and will raise issues about ecosystems, grazing and hunting and the value of springbok to people and place.

The touring exhibition will begin in 2010 and trek across the Northern Cape from Prieska to Victoria West and in to the Free State from Philippolis to Bloemfontein. The physical tour will visit local towns, schools and farms as well as museums and libraries in major towns and the cities of Kimberley and Bloemfontein.

Accompanying the tour a talking wall will enable local people to add their thoughts, memories and perceptions of the springbok. These notes will be collected at the end of the tour and used to guide local development and reintroduction policies.

As the tour passes from town to town the project team will work with local and regional museums and libraries to encourage schools to use the theme of the Trekbokke to create artwork to help illustrate the tour and which can act as a lasting legacy for local communities when the tour treks on.

## **The Tour – Contents, Audiences and Timescales**

### **Contents**

**Panels** – a set of panels depicting the history of the springbok in the Karoo; the trekbokke and springbok natural history. Each panel will be self-contained in terms of the information they feature allowing panels to be used in different settings dependent upon available space and audience. All panels will feature the springbok as a central focus; from adult to lambs and normal, black and white springbok. Depictions from rock-art, nature history and historic records will be used. A central panel will seek to recreate a trekbokke event, based on historic records and images of springbok herds and other mass migrations such as the recent antelope migrations photographed in Sudan – replacing other antelopes with springbok; to bring the drama of a trekbokke to life. For The project will explore creating smaller panels in the outline of springbok. All panels will be made of weather-proof material so that they can be presented outside during summer months and easily dismantled and packaged for shipping between exhibition venues.

**Talking Wall** – accompanying the springbok panels will be a blank panel based on a drop-net used in game ranching on which people visiting the exhibition and in the local community to will be encouraged to write, draw or otherwise express their feelings, attitudes, perceptions of the springbok, the exhibition, game-farming, or life in the Karoo in general. These comments will be gathered and presented back to individual communities at the end of the exhibition tour.

**Educational literature** – two sets of literature will be developed to accompany the exhibition. The first of these will be posters and leaflets to market the exhibition. The second will be a tour map booklet and poster for distribution to venue and non-venue sites in the local community. These will provide information on the history of the springbok taken from the exhibition panels, but perhaps more importantly information on the reintroduction of the springbok, the benefits this could bring to farmers and communities and the

work of the Nama-Karoo Foundation and contacts. Other promotional literature will be considered, for example springbok shaped drinks mats for distribution to cafes and bars in the region.

**Springbox** – a schools learning box, to be called the *Springbox*, will be created containing educational information on the springbok and trekbokke for school-children. These will comprise copies of a mini-talking wall, a trekbokke game, posters, and a springbok-in-pieces made of card or laminated paper on whose parts fun facts about the springbok will be written, so that school-children can put together a springbok and learn about it.

**Art Installation** – as part of the long-term legacy of the exhibition and promotion of springbok reintroduction the project will explore the opportunity for an art installation. The proposed format for this installation is to create a modern trekbokke. Working with local communities the aim will be to create an artificial springbok herd; suggested numbers could be 113 to commemorate the number of years since the last great 'trekbokke' or 130 being the number of springbok illustrated on a rare depiction of Khoisan rock-art noted by the explorer George Stow in 1930. The springbok herd will be made out of scrap-metal, inscribed with a number with the aim of placing them in negotiation with a local farmer on a piece of land on the trekbokke route where they will come into view one of the main roads within the Carnarvon and Richmond area. Permission will also be sought for a smaller group or single springbok figures to be placed at selected picnic spots also along the main roads. These installations will feature details of the trekbokke and the reintroduction project. As well as promoting the work of the Nama-Karoo Foundation, the trekbokke story and the benefits of springbok reintroduction these installations by being made by local people will provide short-term employment and long-term skills development in the local communities where the exhibition will tour.

### **Audience**

The exhibition will be accessible to all within the local community, as well as internal SA tourists to the Karoo and external global visitors to the region. However, elements of the panel contents and associated literature will be drafted to target information to farmers and other land-owners. These will look at issues regarding springbok vs sheep grazing ecology, and the benefits of springbok reintroduction on local economies.

### **Activities**

As the exhibition develops contact will be made with local libraries and museums and other venues to explore the possibility of talks, discussion evenings, school activities, that could accompany the touring exhibition. An installation launch will also be considered. Local people will also be invited to use the theme of the trekbokke and springbok to develop their own activities.

It is possible that a trekbokke or springbok brand could be created that people could use to connect their own activities, art or craft work to the central exhibition during the period of the tour. WebPages detailing the tour itinerary, inviting comments via an online talking wall, and providing access to promotional literature will also be created.

### **Community involvement**

The creation and movement of panels, the art installation, marketing and associated activities will all try to involve individuals, schools, and institutions from the local communities to develop and deliver the project. Venues, local 'springbok champions', speakers for talks and discussion evenings will all be sourced through local communities. A possible outcome from the tour could also be the identification of trekbokke visitor guides to sites of interest mentioned in the historic record. These could be the same 'springbok' champions' mentioned above.

### **Partners**

Museums, libraries, and other regional institutions will be contacted as possible partners for the delivery of the exhibition tour. It would be hoped that at some point the exhibition could feature in one or more of the main museums in Kimberley or Graaf-Reinet to raise awareness of the Trekbokke to a wider audience. It is also hoped that historic objects and records may be sourced through the museums that could be put on show at these venues or possibly copied for inclusion in the main touring exhibition itself.

### **Tour**

**Route:** It is suggested that the tour follows the approximate route of the historic trekbokke; principally that last one recorded in 1896. This will take the exhibition from Prieska down to Carnarvon and Vosburg, through Loxton to Victoria West, up to Britstown then across to Richmond; Philipstown and finally Colesburg and Philippolis. The option of additional stops will be explored for Upington; Kimberley, Beaufort West and Graaff-Reinet, some Karoo towns in the Western and Eastern Cape and possibly for one or more the national parks. This will widen the audience for the tour.

**Locations:** It is proposed to locate venues along the trekbokke route of two sorts; one to host the main exhibition and others to host smaller semi-permanent panels or posters. Although the tour as a project will have an end-date, the panels will remain available for travel around other venues on demand. A post-project touring programme for the panels will be explored toward the end of the project, to take the exhibition to towns in the Karoo region not featured in the initial main programme.