



**HIGH FLYER:** A kite glides over festival-goers at AfrikaBurn, held in the Tankwa Karoo, between Ceres and Calvinia. The festival, inspired by the Burning Man festival in the US, has become known for its colourful art and cultural creations, as well as the spirit of sharing it fosters.

Pictures: JAN TALJAARD

## Karoo festival ignites alternative communal spirit in desert of dreams

JAN TALJAARD

THE arid heart of the Tankwa Karoo has burst into life with the AfrikaBurn festival.

Unlike the three previous years, the festival – at the weekend – was held in the more forgiving climate of late April rather than early August, when wind, crackling cold nights and daylight scorches conspire against avid “burners”.

Not that the question of weather conditions seemed to preoccupy any of the estimated 2 000 people who turned up this year to celebrate “self-reliance” and the “radically participatory ethic” touted by organisers.

Caution and clothing were flung to the wind as festival-goers observed the unspoken ethic of AfrikaBurn – let’s party.

AfrikaBurn is described on its website as a “creative arts and freedom of expression festival that aims to build temporary community through collaborative arts projects, in a completely non-commercial environment”.

Driving in the village is not allowed, no rubbish may be thrown away and, in the spirit of sharing, nothing may be bought or sold.



**PARTY BUS:** A brightly decorated car and trailer serve as a home away from home for some participants at AfrikaBurn.

Held in possibly one of the driest places in South Africa, just off the longest stretch of dirt road in South Africa between the towns of Ceres and Calvinia, the festival was inspired by the Burning Man that has been taking place as an

art happening in Nevada’s Black Rock desert since 1986.

The event entails the creation of mostly wooden sculptures or art installations around a chosen theme, and it culminates in these structures – some immense – being set alight.

This year, the theme of the South African event was “Dreams”, and was brought to life with such art installations such as that titled Morpheus’s Tent of Dreams.

There were also several art performances, such as a fairly

ethereal portrayal of Afrikaans poet Ingrid Jonker by Lara Kirsten.

It was also about dreams of the future.

In Camp Isidigimi, computer wizards such as Bretton Vine and Bruce Strover were putting together a solar-powered wireless telephone system.

Based on open source software and using a virtual exchange, they eventually rolled out nodes all across Tankwa Town, making it, for instance, possible to ring up the people in the medical tent from any of these nodes.

“We are only starting now, but the idea is that you will eventually be able to literally throw handsets off the back of a bakkie in a village enabling people to phone each other for free,” Strover said.

The so-called Department of Mutant Vehicles was also out in force, with participants transforming everyday vehicles into works of art.

Capetonian Paul Honig, who arrived with myriad small children and wife in tow, also brought along his scooters, which he had dressed up as bunny slippers.