



The NG Kerk in Calvinia stands tall and proud.

Amid the heat, an oasis of calm

A visit to Calvinia revives memories and allows, among the quiet, time for reflection for **Katherine Graham** and her family

HEADING north from Cape Town along the N7, I feel as if I'm embarking on a pilgrimage. OK, perhaps pilgrimage is too strong a word to use in this context. Still, it's been seven years since I last visited Calvinia, the Northern Cape dorp where my mother was born. And my husband, a born and bred East Londoner, has never ventured this far north before. Neither has our son Samuel, although he's only 21 months old, so that hardly counts.

When we reach the Knersvlakte, the impressive open spaces finally hit home. "Wow, this is amazing," Gavin marvels. I remind him to keep his eyes on the road, which winds its way to the top of the escarpment. The Knersvlakte (which literally means "gnashing plains") are thought to derive their name from the sound the wagon wheels made as they rode over the quartz stone found in this area. I prefer my aunt Elise's explanation: "It was because the poor Voortrekkers were gnashing their teeth as they walked across these desolate plains."

At my parent's suggestion, we've decided to stay in Nieuwoudtville (pronounced "Newtville") at a self-catering guesthouse called Bokmakierie. There is electricity, gas heating for the water and stove and – a big treat! – an electric blanket on our double bed. We source eggs from the neighbour across the road (you



The distinctive kokerboom.

can't get more free-range than this) and feed our leftover carrots to the sheep and pregnant goat in the adjacent plot.

There's a windmill on the property that waters the garden and the day after we arrive we sit on the stoep, like the proverbial oupa and ouma, listening to the blades clacking in the wind. There's not another sound to be heard in the hot, still air. "So this is what we drove five hours for – to sit and listen to the silence,"



Flowers in Hantam National Botanical Garden show off the area's beauty.

Gavin mutters.

"Yes," I reply. "Isn't it wonderful?"

We've a day to ourselves before our friends, the Rozendaals, arrive, so we're back in the car to visit Calvinia.

"This is a lot bigger than I thought it would be," muses Gavin, who spends some time taking pictures of the town's imposing Dutch Reformed church.

Named after John Calvin, Calvinia is known as sheep country. You can get the best lamb chops in South Africa here and some lekker biltong, too.

We spend an hour in the Hantam Huis, a house built in 1854 which has been restored by Alta and Erwin Coetzee.

Laid out in a T-shape, it's the oldest authenticated house in Calvinia. Walking from room to room, you're transported to what life must have been like for farmers in this area 100 years ago.

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