

Cherry Festival Magazine

Issue 59 / November 2026
Free Copy

Ficksburg — Yours to Discover

Editor's Note

The 2026 Cherry Festival brings a lively programme of events and experiences to Ficksburg. From farm visits and steam trains to gardens, music and outdoor activities, there is plenty to enjoy, with something for every visitor.

Families, couples and visitors travelling through the Eastern Free State will also find reasons to stay longer and see what makes this area special.

The festival stretches well beyond the town centre, so make time to explore. Ionia Cherry Farm is always a special stop, with live music, the cherry harvest and the chance to enjoy the atmosphere of one of our farms. Sandstone Estate is another highlight, home to the world's largest collection of narrow-gauge steam trains. It is a wonderful place to discover this remarkable collection.

There is plenty happening, too. Along the R26 towards Clocolan, call in at Constantia Farmstall for entertainment, cherry tours and a tempting selection of cherry-inspired treats. A little further along, The Cabin offers its country-store atmosphere, while Ben Nevis welcomes visitors to its charming cellar for activities and the ever-popular cherry wine tasting. Take the opportunity to visit our wine farms along the way.

Garden lovers can look forward to the Open Gardens, as well as our Town Gardens initiative, where residents are opening their own gardens for visitors to enjoy. It is a lovely way to see Ficksburg and appreciate the care that goes into these spaces. A new trail run on one of our local farms adds another way to get out and experience the area.

There is plenty in town, too. The original showgrounds will host the Fun Fair, with rides and entertainment for children and families. Across Ficksburg and the surrounding district, smaller events, pop-up gatherings, live music and local food will bring the weekend alive. The Cherry Soul Festival in early November and the Cherry Soccer Cup add to the celebrations and bring people together.

Our travel magazine and guide is a starting point for exploring Ficksburg and neighbouring Fouriesburg, Rosendal and Clocolan. There is so much to see beyond festival weekend. I hope you take the scenic roads, visit local attractions and plan another trip.



It is a pleasure to share my beautiful part of the world, Ficksburg, with you. We welcome you with open arms. Enjoy the festival, make the most of your time here and, above all, come back soon to discover even more of what our region has to offer.

Cherry Greetings,

Gavin Boy
Editor

Magazine Publishing
Gavin Boy: 082 920 5551
Victoria House
4 Erwee Street, Ficksburg
www.thevictoriahouse.co.za



Cherry Festival Weekend Programme

Friday 13 & Saturday 14 November

Two days of live music, cherry picking, great food, and the best of Ficksburg in full swing.

IONIA CROP FESTIVAL – Ionia Farm

Two-day festival with full artist line-up and live entertainment

Food stalls, craft market, and local produce

Cherry tours and pick-your-own experiences

Family-friendly atmosphere with music, art, and local culture

CONSTANTIA CHERRY FARM

Open both Friday and Saturday

Market stalls and local wine tasting

Cherry orchard tours and cherry product sales

Picnic-friendly setting under the trees

BEN NEVIS CHERRY FARM

Cherry wine cellar open for tastings

Local cherry products and homemade treats

Guided orchard tours available throughout both days

SANDSTONE HERITAGE TRUST

Two-day event featuring:

Steam train rides

Military and heritage exhibitions

Historic vehicles and machinery displays

Family-friendly with food stalls and activities for children

OPEN GARDENS – Ficksburg & Surrounds

Selection of private gardens open for viewing

Morning to late afternoon both days

A showcase of local gardening and spring blooms

FUN FAIR – Ficksburg Show Grounds

Open Friday and Saturday

Rides, games, and entertainment for children and teens

FICKSBURG GOLF CLUB EVENTS

Thursday 12 November
Cherry Fever Sundowner Golf – Tee-off at
Cherry Fever Night Golf

Pro Shop Club – 13 golf lessons available throughout the period

Friday 13 & Saturday 14 November
Pro Shop Cherry Classic – Two-ball, better ball
Shotgun start at 11:00 both days

Trail Run

Saturday 14 November : 7:00
5km | 8 km | 15 km
Venue Omdraai Guest Farm
info@omdraaifarm.co.za

2026 IONIA
Cherry
CROP CELEBRATION



Spoegwolf

ioniacherryfarm.co.za

12–14 November

Bok van Blerk
Jakkals Vibes
Early B • Rudo Schwim

Cherry Picking
Excludes Entrance

THU, FRI & SAT
Kids 4 - 12 | **R185**
Adults | **R235**
Pensioners | **R215**





Camping

Thursday & Friday
Kids 4 - 12 **R180** / ppn
Adults **R345** / ppn
Pensioners **R330** / ppn

Saturday
Kids 4 - 12 **R205** / ppn
Adults **R345** / ppn
Pensioners **R330** / ppn

Includes Entrance





Pilates in the Orchard
Kids | **R280**
Adutls | **R335**
Pensioners| **R315**
Includes Entrance

Entrance
Thursday & Friday
Free

Saturday
Kids | **R150**
Adults | **R250**
Pensioners | **R235**





Programme

THURSDAY 12 NOVEMBER
08:00 - Gates Open
08:00-18:00 - Christmas Market
09:00-16:00 - Cherry Picking Tours
11:00 - Sip & Paint

FRIDAY 13 NOVEMBER
08:00 - Gates Open
08:00-16:00 - Cherry Picking Tours
08:00-18:00 - Christmas Market
12:00-17:00 - Wine tasting
11:00 - Sip & Paint
14:00 - Minute to Munch it

Saturday

08:00 - Gates Open
08:00-20:00 - Christmas Market
08:00-16:00 - Cherry Picking Tours
09:00-17:00 - Wine Tasting
08:30 - Cherry Fun Walk registration
08:30 - Orchard Pilates registration
09:00 - Cherry Fun Walk
09:00 - Orchard Pilates
11:00-13:00 - The Cherry Kitchen Food Demo with Eats by Nicke and Marisa de Bruyn from Vastrap Farm

14 NOVEMBER
13:00 - Minute to Munch it
14:00 - Saartjie by die kroeg
14:00 - Sip & Paint
15:00 - Rudo Schwim
16:00 - Cherry Pit Spit
16:30 - Bok van Blerk
17:30 - Ken jy jou Cherry
18:00 - Early B
19:00 - Spoegwolf
20:00 - Jakkals Vibes (after party)

EST. 1996
CELEBRATING *30 years* OF THE SANDSTONE HERITAGE COLLECTION

SANDSTONE HERITAGE MUSEUM

CHERRY STEAM FESTIVAL

Gates open **09:00 - 18:00**
Trains run from **10:00**

12 - 14 NOVEMBER 2026



ENTRANCE
Adults **R385 pp**
Pensioners (60+) **R315 pp**
Children (4-15yo) **R195 pp**
Children aged 3 & under are free
Multi-day discounts available!

Welcome to the Free State's world famous 2ft Narrow Gauge Heritage Railway







Sandstone is on the R26 route between Ficksburg & Fouriesburg, Free State, South Africa.

Enjoy steam train adventures, ox wagon rides, military vehicles, historic farming displays & vintage aircraft flips alongside the local cherry harvest celebration!

Short train rides, classic vehicles and an array of heritage displays will run throughout the day and are included in your ticket. Ox wagons run until 12pm.

SEKONYELA TRAIN TIMES:

Flagship 2-hour train journey - additional ticket required

Thursday - 14h00
Friday - 11h00 &15h00
Saturday - 10h30, 14h00 & 17h00

Programme is subject to change. These are old machines and sometimes move at their own pace.

LOCAL FOOD & CRAFTS STALLS
WAENHUIS BAR • BEER TENT

Tickets & latest programme on Quicket or **www.sandstone.co.za**

CONSTANTIA CHERRY
COUNTRY FESTIVAL

SAT, 14 NOVEMBEF

ON THE R26 BETWEEN FICKSBURG & CLOCOLAN

WILLEM BOTHA LIVE

MAKE-UP MASTERCLASS AT THE FESTIVAL

FREE ENTRY
08:00 TO 17:00

Live Music · Food Stalls
· Craft Stalls · Gin Bar
· Jumping Castle
· Fresh Cherries

R50 FOR THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES:

Putt-putt competition, all day, with big prizes
Pony rides, all day

11:00 Puppet Show
12:30 Magic Show, for adults & children

MAIN SHOW
TICKET · R380
BOOK YOUR SEAT

11:00 **Cherry cooking demonstration** with Chef Patso-Plamen Nikolov
12:00 **Fashion Parade**
13:00 **Willem Botha Live and make-up masterclass**

MASTERCLASS SEATS ARE LIMITED



FREE ENTRY TO FESTIVAL

Book: Ansie 083 276 2871 · Gwynet 082 304 7043

Open Gardens

OF THE

EASTERN FREE STATE

Step into a world of timeless beauty, where working farm landscapes are transformed into living artistry. Against the backdrop of golden fields, rugged mountains, and wide-open skies, each garden reflects the dedication and vision of those who nurture them.

These are not city gardens, but country sanctuaries – created on family farms where generations have tended the land. From sweeping homestead lawns to hidden corners bursting with colour, every garden tells a story of resilience, heritage, and rural charm.

Join us as the Eastern Free State opens its farm gates and welcomes you to wander, admire, and be inspired by its most treasured landscapes.

Explore. Be inspired. Celebrate the Eastern Free State in full bloom.

DATES:
Saturday, 14 November 2026
Sunday, 15 November 2026

Saturday, 21 November 2026
Sunday, 22 November 2026

TIMES:
Mostly 9am – 4pm with the exception of Groot Verwulf Farm that opens at 10am.

COST:
R50pp per garden. Cash at the gate.

For general enquiries and directions to the gardens, contact Toni on

WHATSAPP:
0726210674

OR

EMAIL:
toni@boschfonteinmountainlodge.co.za

GARDENS INCLUDED:



KEBLE ESTATE
Clocolan



KIRKLINGTON FARM
Ficksburg



BOSCHFONTEIN FARM
Ficksburg



RENSBURGHOEK FARM
Ficksburg



GROOT VERWULF FARM
Fouriesburg



THE ROSE HOUSE AND
MILE HIGH VINEYARDS
Fouriesburg

Boschfontein Garden – Ficksburg's English Country Surprise

Ficksburg is known for its sandstone buildings, rich history, and mountain views — but just outside town lies a secret that captures every garden lover's heart: Boschfontein Garden.

This is no ordinary garden. It's a living, breathing celebration of colour, form, and patience — a true English country garden, grown with the care and creativity of someone who understands what beauty means in all seasons.

The story begins in 1976, when Janet Barrett moved to Boschfontein, a family farm dating back to 1885, after marrying Essex Barrett. There was always a garden here, but after retiring in 2020, Janet poured her heart into transforming it into the masterpiece it is today. Drawing on her years of gardening experience in Pietermaritzburg, she's created a space that feels timeless yet deeply personal.

Boschfontein is a garden that invites you to slow down. Each pathway reveals a different personality — from shaded corners framed by ancient trees to terraces that open onto bursts of azaleas and roses. The cobblestone steps lead you past borders that change colour with the months. Spring arrives in a rush of azaleas and irises; summer hums with hydrangeas, lavender, and the soft scent of roses that bloom well into autumn. Every turn feels deliberate, every plant perfectly placed.

A hand-built sandstone reservoir pool glints through the greenery — an unexpected touch that blends history with artistry. It feels like something borrowed from an old English estate, quietly elegant and wonderfully unique.

Among the ornamentals, a small vegetable garden and citrus grove remind you that this is still a working Free State farm — one where beauty and practicality live side by side.

But what gives Boschfontein its soul is its sense of peace. From almost anywhere, the view rolls out across the fields towards the Maluti Mountains, framed by the original 1885 sandstone farmhouse — a reminder that heritage here runs deep.

Boschfontein isn't just a garden; it's a reflection of a life's work. A little piece of English countryside rooted firmly in Ficksburg soil — and proof that passion, patience, and good earth can create something truly extraordinary.

Janet — 083 654 9952





Gardens of Ficksburg

Ficksburg is particularly beautiful in spring, with our gardens usually reaching their best towards the end of October. By Cherry Festival weekend, some of the flowers will have passed their peak, but there is still plenty of colour, interesting planting and beautiful garden spaces to enjoy. This year, several residents have opened their gardens to visitors, offering a lovely opportunity to see what people in our town have created and nurtured over the years.

Our Town Gardens initiative is all about celebrating the gardens of ordinary residents who have put time, thought and considerable effort into their little pieces of paradise. Each garden has its own character, style and collection of plants. It's a wonderful way to take a leisurely walk around town, meet the people behind the gardens and appreciate the gardening talent we have right here in Ficksburg.

A particularly worthwhile visit is the Imperani Old Age Home. The property consists of a cluster of charming little cottages, each with its own garden and character. What makes this stop especially lovely is the involvement of the residents themselves, who take great pride in their gardens and play an active part in looking after them. Together, these gardens make a beautiful showcase of what can be achieved through a shared love of gardening. Take some time to walk through the grounds and appreciate the work that goes into keeping them so attractive.

At Kersiehuis Guest House, Ina van Jaarsveld has created a delightful garden with some particularly interesting plant collections. Ina has a real passion for horticulture and is very knowledgeable about plants. As head of the Ficksburg Horticultural Society, she is always an interesting person to talk to, especially if you enjoy discovering unusual plants and varieties you don't come across every day. There will also be refreshments under the tree, making this a lovely place to pause and enjoy the garden.
7 Visser Street | Ina: 082 553 2262

Victoria House Guest House is also opening its gardens to visitors. Our historic walled garden has a distinctive character, with sandstone from the surrounding area featuring throughout the garden design. The old sandstone wall surrounding the property gives the garden a wonderful sense of enclosure, while the large open lawns provide a lovely contrast to the stonework. It's an interesting garden to explore, particularly if you appreciate the use of natural local materials in garden design.
4 Erwee Street | Gavin: 082 920 5551

Jean and Duncan Peacock have taken great pride in creating their own little country cottage garden. Tucked away, this is a compact English-style garden with plenty of charm, lovely planting and a wonderful sense of care. It is a pleasure to see how much character can be created in a smaller garden, and well worth making time for.
85 Bester Street | Jean: 083 411 3752

Our final garden stop is Dreamscape Nursery, where Rosie and Wilma, a mother-and-daughter team, have put a great deal of work into creating a colourful and attractive garden. Although relatively new, the garden has been thoughtfully put together, with a lovely variety of plants and plenty to look at. There is also a nursery on the property, so you may well find something you'd like to take home and add to your own garden.

The gardens will be open on Friday from 09:00 to 16:00 and Saturday from 09:00 to 14:00. Some venues will have refreshments available, so take your time and enjoy the experience.

We look forward to welcoming you and sharing a little of our love for gardening







Attractions to Discover in Ficksburg

1. All Saints' Anglican Church
Admire Helen Tennant's rare stained-glass windows, each panel telling its own story in colour and light.
Muffy 083 460 5842

2. Pierneef Art Gallery
By appointment only, you can view Jacobus Pierneef's works inside the primary school hall — a cultural gem hidden in plain sight.
Johan 066 226 6727



3. Gumtree Sandstone Mill
This towering structure is the highest sandstone building in the Southern Hemisphere and a reminder of Ficksburg's quarrying past.

4. CR Swart Prison
A place once tied to South Africa's first State President — its cells whisper echoes of a very different time.

5. Old Cemetery
Walk among Anglo-Boer War, World War I and II graves, and monuments to lives that shaped the region.

6. Sandstone Estate
A farm with the world's largest narrow-gauge steam collection, where working locomotives and heritage farming displays come alive.
Bianca 064 752 3852

7. Cherry Farm Stalls
Constantia, Ionia, and The Cabin are your go-to stops for fresh cherries, jams, and homemade country treats.

8. Pinedene Gun Museum
Charlie and Morgan Barrett's extraordinary firearm collection spans decades of South African and global history.
Charles 082 784 6041

9. Boschfontein Garden
Janet Barrett's masterpiece of planting and colour offers one of the most beautiful private gardens in the district.
Janet 083 654 9952

10. NG Kerk
The Dutch Reformed Church anchors the town square with Romanesque sandstone and a majestic pipe organ.
Audi 073 808 6189

11. Ficksburg Border Post
Unique in South Africa — a border crossing right inside the town, leading straight into Lesotho.

12. Templehof Game Farm
Family-friendly encounters with antelope, farm animals, and even lions just outside Ficksburg.
Ansie 082 213 1299

13. Ficksburg Airfield
Home to the Free State's second-longest runway, plus a heated pool used for hydrotherapy and training.
Anita 082 569 2174

14. Imperani Mountain Drive
A scenic climb to panoramic views of Lesotho, snow-capped Malutis, and the town itself

15. Ficksburg Golf Club
An 18-hole course with mountain views — a treat for both serious golfers and casual players.
Kay-leigh 071 095 0256

16. Weekly Parkrun
Every Saturday, join locals for a 5 km jog (or walk) through a friendly community setting.
Fiona 083 461 1575

17. Victoria House Gardens
Roses, peonies, and tranquil poolside corners make this guest house a favourite with visitors.
Gavin 082 920 5551



18. Ficksburg Bowls Club
Friendly games, open greens, and a relaxed welcome for visitors looking to join in.
Ali 082 338 8595

19. Country Drives
Scenic routes around the town lead to cherry orchards, sandstone cliffs, and endless Eastern Free State skies.

20. Die Blik Plek
A quirky stop full of vintage tins, old signs, and nostalgic curiosities waiting to be discovered.
Sandra 082 828 8381

Seasonal Events & Festivals in Ficksburg



November: Ficksburg Cherry Festival
Ionia Crop Festival — three days of cherries, farm tours, steam train rides, and country fun.

November: Cherry Jazz Festival
Jazz fills the orchards with open-air performances and soulful sounds during cherry season.

November: Cherry Soul Festival
A lively mix of music, dance, and community spirit — cherries with a soulful twist.

November: Cherry Golf Classic
A highlight for golf lovers, drawing players from across the region to Ficksburg's historic course.

November: Cherry Bowls Classic
A friendly yet competitive bowls tournament that brings sporting flair to cherry season.

November: Cherry Festival Trail Run.
A new event to the calendar.

November: Cherry Bowls Classic
A friendly yet competitive bowls tournament that brings sporting flair to cherry season.

November: Cherry Soccer Cup
Local teams battle it out in a spirited tournament, adding sport to the Cherry Festival atmosphere

November: Open Gardens
Private gardens open their gates each November, showcasing blooms and creative landscaping.

November: Cherry Festival Train Rides at Sandstone
During the Cherry Festival, narrow-gauge steam trains offer scenic rides through the farm.

Easter: Cosmos Festival & Train Rides
Cosmos Festival & Steam Train Rides | Easter 2027

From 25–28 March, the cosmos fields come alive as Sandstone's world-class collection of heritage steam trains rolls into action. Enjoy unforgettable train rides through fields of blooming cosmos and experience a unique celebration of railway heritage in the heart of the Eastern Free State.
As fields of cosmos burst into bloom, Sandstone's steam trains roll out, offering unforgettable rides through cosmos.

March: The book of Ester Festival. The Book of Esther Festival – Ionia Cherry Farm 20 March
An exclusive women's event hosted by Dr Elza Meyer, celebrating faith, courage and the God-given purpose of women. Inspired by Queen Esther's story, this special gathering honours women's strength, wisdom and influence in their families and communities.

September: Four Peaks Mountain Run
A runner's dream—four mountain peaks, one challenging trail, and all the stamina you can carry through crisp spring air.

Day Trips from Ficksburg

Trip 1

The Sandstone Mill at Gumtree

Begin your day by visiting one of the most striking edifices in our region — the old sandstone mill at Gumtree. Built of local sandstone, this vast structure is often described as the tallest sandstone building in the country.

Constantia Cherry Farmstall

Next, head on the R26 between Ficksburg and Clocolan to the farm-store of the celebrated cherry farm, Constantia. Here you'll find cherry-based products from fresh fruit to liqueurs, ice-cream toppings, specialty juices — and also a charming shop with home-style décor and preserves
Take some time for a light lunch or a cherry-smoothie break, browse the gift items, and soak up the farm-stall atmosphere.

The Cabin Farmstall

After Constantia, continue via Clocolan to The Cabin farm-store — a delightful stop for collectible and sandstone items, farm-style products and décor. It's a relaxed place to pick up unique keepsakes.

Highlands Essential Oils

A bit further along, visit the distillery and shop of Highlands Essential Oils on Vlakbult Farm near Clocolan. Here they extract essences from indigenous plants — roses, iris roots, and more — with a door-shop and workshops (perfume-making included).

Ben Nevis Cherry Farm & Cellar

Finish your day at this cherry farm tucked at the foot of the Clocolan Mountains — the first (and only) registered cherry wine cellar in South Africa.
Here you can taste cherry wines and liqueurs, shop dried fruit and bottled products, and enjoy the farm-setting.

Trip 2

Charlie's Cherry Liqueur & Pinedene Small Arms Museum

Your first stop is at Charlie Barrett's farm, home of the famous Charlie's Cherry Liqueur — a sweet local favourite made from his own orchards.
While there, explore the Pinedene Small Arms Museum, one of South Africa's finest private firearm collections. It's a fascinating mix of history and craftsmanship, tucked away on a working farm.

Janet Barrett's Garden

Ficksburg's Open Garden Gem
Just down the road, visit Janet Barrett's award-winning garden, part of the Open Gardens of Ficksburg.
Janet's garden is a peaceful, meticulously designed space bursting with seasonal colour and clever planting

Sandstone Heritage Trust

Next, continue to the Sandstone Estate, a world-class heritage farm and home to one of the largest narrow-gauge steam train collections in the world.
Beyond its impressive steam locomotives, Sandstone preserves old-world trades — from blacksmithing to vintage tractors and military vehicles. It's pure nostalgia in motion and a photographer's dream.

Ionia Cherry Farm

Your next cherry-themed stop is Ionia Cherry Farm, one of the region's historic farms known for its quality fruit and local hospitality. During cherry season, visitors can sample fresh produce, preserves, and a range of cherry delights.

Into Fouriesburg

From Ionia, take the road toward Fouriesburg, a charming farming town surrounded by sandstone mountains and rolling fields. Pop into the Jack Daniels Bar — a local favourite and the perfect spot for a cold drink or lunch.

Mile High Altitude Wines

On the road toward Clarens, visit Mile High Altitude Wines, one of the highest vineyards in South Africa.
They produce only three exclusive red wines — bold, elegant, and truly shaped by altitude.
A tasting here, surrounded by mountains, is something special.

Trip 3
A Day Out in Rosendal

If you're looking for a great little day trip from Ficksburg, head out to Rosendal. It's a small village with a big personality and plenty to see for an easy, relaxed outing.

Start with a visit to the ARK Gallery and the Willem Pretorius Gallery — both packed with local art and creative energy. Then pop into the Service Station Wine Bar, a real

treat if you're after something tasty with a good glass of wine. It's one of those places where time seems to slow down, and that's exactly what makes it special.

If you're hungry for more, book a table at Rooi Tamatie — it's well known in the area and run by the talented chef Renet Fössler, who you might recognise from TV. The food is excellent, and the atmosphere is just right for a long, lazy lunch.

There's also Zaria, who does eco-printing workshops that are lovely if you're in the mood for something creative, and don't miss the row of tiny homes in town — they're quirky, clever and worth a quick drive-by.

For a casual stop, Yolla's and the Rosendal Handelshuis are both great spots for coffee, light meals, or a bit of something sweet before heading back.

Rosendal has that rare mix of art, food, and charm — the kind of place that makes you want to linger a little longer before heading home.

Trip 4
Discover Lesotho
Katse Dam

GPS: S 29° 19' 53.6 E 028° 30' 36.6

A breathtaking drive from Ficksburg through the Bokong Nature Reserve leads to Lesotho's spectacular Katse Dam, one of the largest in Africa. Part of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, it provides water to South Africa and power to Lesotho. The Visitors' Centre offers daily dam wall tours, and the nearby Katse Village has pony rides, village tours, and boat trips on the dam.

Katse Botanical Gardens

GPS: S 29° 20' 05.1 E 028° 28' 53.1

Just above the dam, the Katse Botanical Gardens are the highest in the Southern Hemisphere. Created to protect mountain flora during the dam's construction, the gardens now feature more than 200 alpine plant species and attract colourful sunbirds and mountain wildlife.

Bokong Nature Reserve

GPS: S 29° 04' 17.2 E 028° 25' 31.9

Perched high in the Maloti Mountains, the Bokong Nature Reserve offers sweeping views over the Lepaqoa Valley. Hike to the famous Lepaqoa Waterfall, which freezes into a pillar of ice in winter, or explore well-marked trails and overnight huts. The area is rich in alpine flowers, birdlife, and even the rare Bearded Vulture.

Ha Lejone Trout Farm

GPS: S 29° 06' 16.1 E 028° 30' 11.8

On the far end of the dam, the Ha Lejone Trout Farm produces premium trout in partnership with the local community. Visitors can learn about trout farming, enjoy the surrounding scenery, and taste some of Lesotho's finest freshwater fish.

Leribe and Gun Tower

(Craft Centre):
S 28° 52' 17.8 E 028° 02' 55.6
Dinosaur Prints):
S 28° 49' 23.4 E 028° 04' 29.7
(Gun Tower):
S 28° 52' 17.4 E 028° 02' 35.1

Entering from Ficksburg, you'll reach Leribe (Hlotse) — a town rich in history from the Gun War era. Visit the old Gun Tower, browse the Leribe Craft Centre for handwoven mohair items, or stop just north of town to see dinosaur footprints preserved in the Subeng River bed.

Trip 5
Thaba-Bosiu

GPS: S 29° 20' 46.4 E 027° 39' 51.0
Tourist Info: +266 223 57207

Lesotho's most historic site and the birthplace of the Basotho nation. King Moshoeshoe I made this sandstone plateau his stronghold during tribal wars. The summit, known as the "Mountain of the Night," offers sweeping views and the Royal Cemetery, where Moshoeshoe and his descendants are buried. The visitors' centre provides easy access to the trail leading to the top.

Kome Caves

GPS: S 29° 14' 38.2 E 027° 52' 00.2
Info & Crafts: +266 588 35143

Located near Teyateyaneng, the Kome Cave Village is a National Heritage Site still home to descendants of its original inhabitants. The sandstone caves were built into an overhang in the 19th century as protection during times of conflict. Visitors can explore the traditional dwellings and learn about the living culture of the Basotho.

Mohair and Tapestries

Elelloang Basali (TY):
S 29° 07' 27.6 E 027° 45' 22.8
Hatooa-Mose Mosali (TY):
S 29° 08' 40.1 E 027° 43' 09.0
Helang Basali (TY):
S 29° 09' 01.7 E 027° 43' 17.9
Setsoto Designs (TY):
S 29° 08' 54.9 E 027° 44' 24.0

Lesotho is known for its world-class mohair and handwoven tapestries. Women's cooperatives in Teyateyaneng produce beautiful rugs, shawls, and ponchos that reflect Basotho heritage and traditional designs — perfect for those wanting an authentic local craft experience.

Trip 6
Liphofung Cave

GPS: S 28° 45′ 16.1 E 028° 29′ 43.1

Liphofung Cave is a fascinating cultural stop. Once home to the San people, its walls still show traces of their rock art and tools. Later, it became a resting place for King Moshoeshoe the Great on his travels. Today, visitors can explore a small centre showcasing San art, Basotho traditions, and the cave's geology, with nearby huts and a campsite offering simple, friendly Basotho hospitality.

Muela Hydropower Station Visitors' Centre

GPS: S 28° 46′ 05.5 E 028° 27′ 15.9

Further along, the Muela Hydropower Station showcases one of Lesotho's most impressive engineering feats — part of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project.

Guided tours take visitors into the heart of the mountain to see this fascinating process in action. It's a surprisingly beautiful and peaceful stop, with a small dam and picnic area overlooking the valley.

New Oxbow Lodge

GPS: S 28° 47′ 56.8 E 028° 32′ 10.8

Set beside the Malibamatsoe River, New Oxbow Lodge is a cosy mountain stop with log fires, trout streams, and fresh highland air — perfect for 4x4 adventurers, birdwatchers, or skiers bound for Afri Ski, just 11 km away. Enjoy coffee or lunch by the river before continuing your climb into Lesotho's highlands.

Afri Ski

GPS: S 28° 49′ 44.4 E 028° 43′ 48.4

Welcome to Afri Ski, Africa's highest and most unique alpine resort. Perched at over 3,000 metres, it offers skiing and snowboarding in winter and mountain biking or hiking in summer.

From family-friendly chalets to backpacker lodges and fine dining at The Gondola, there's something for every traveller.

For more information on day trips in and around Ficksburg, Rosendal, Fouriesburg and Lesotho, please contact Gavin on 082 920 5551 — we'll be happy to assist.

For regional details,
Fouriesburg Information 064 484 3980
Rosendal Information 083 294 5260

Ben Nevis – Sou
Cherry W

If there's one place in the Eastern Free State that captures both history and passion in a bottle, it's Ben Nee producer in South Africa, and every drop that leaves the cellar tells a story of family, resilience, and creativity.

When you arrive at the farm near Clocolan, you're greeted by orchards that stretch out against the backdrop of the mountains. The property's name may come from Scotland's highest peak, but its soul is rooted right here in the Free State. It was in 1974 that husband and wife Pietie and Carina Botha moved to Ben Nevis. Pietie, a former dairy and wheat farmer, made the bold decision to continue the area's cherry-growing tradition — one that began here in 1927. Today, Ben Nevis proudly holds the distinction of being the second-oldest cherry farm in South Africa, with one of the original 50 trees planted in 1935 still standing strong in the orchards.

For Pietie and Carina, farming was never just about crops — it was about vision. Out of curiosity, they began experimenting with cherry wine. What started as a small hobby soon grew into something extraordinary, and they went on to establish the first and only registered cherry wine cellar in South Africa, as well as becoming the first in the country to produce cherry liqueur. Their passion turned Ben Nevis into a name known far beyond the Free State.

After Pietie passed away, their son PJ — an architect by trade — chose to return to the farm with his wife, joining Carina to continue the family tradition. Together, they've expanded the product range and breathed new energy into the farm. The winemaking remains a labor of love: cherries are picked by hand, carefully destalked, and then placed into drums to be heated and crushed until fermentation takes place. The juice is then filtered off and transformed into wine in much the same way grape wines are made. It's hard work, but the results speak for themselves.

Ben Nevis now produces three distinctive cherry wines, ranging between 11–13% alcohol, along with a rich cherry liqueur sitting at 24%. And then there's the much-loved plum dessert wine — born when the plum market collapsed and the Bothas turned a challenge into an opportunity, creating something delicious and new.

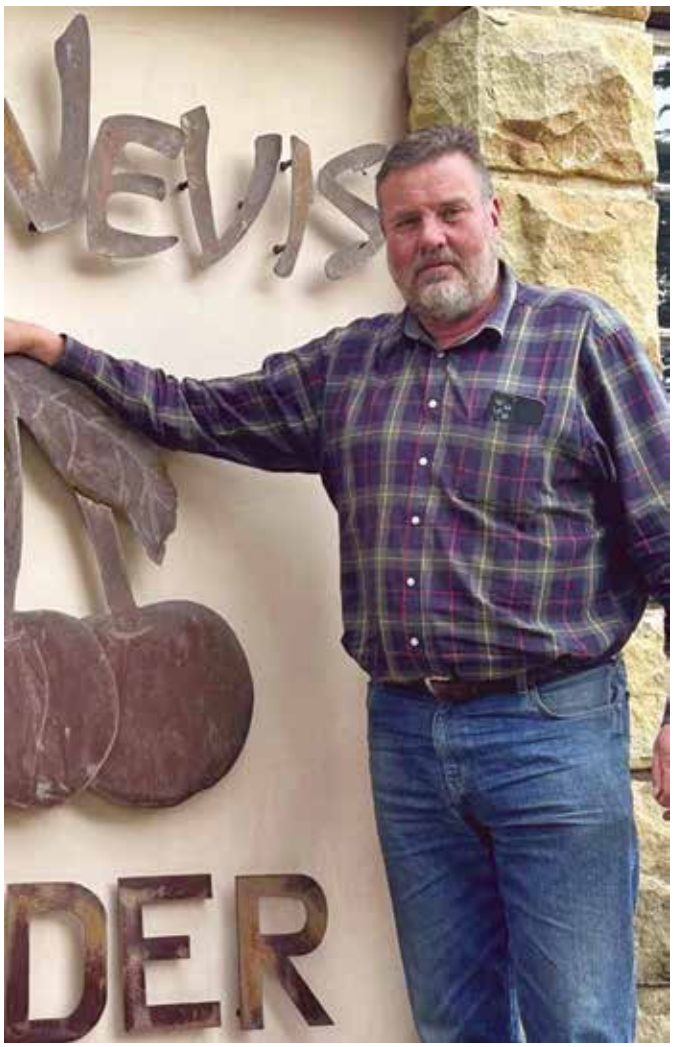
But Ben Nevis is more than just wine. Their

ıth Africa's Only ine Cellar









shelves are filled with maraschino cherries, jams, sauces, creamy cherry liqueurs, truffles, chocolate-dipped treats, and even a lighter sparkling cherry plum cooler for those who prefer something refreshing. They've also made the most of everything the farm gives them — brambles are turned into bramble jam or blended with cherries, while peaches, figs, and other fruit find their way into chutneys and preserves. It's farm-to-table creativity at its finest.

November is when Ben Nevis truly comes alive. During the month of the Ficksburg Cherry Festival, the farm hosts special cherry tours and wine-tasting experiences. Visitors can enjoy a full programme of activities on the estate, making the festival week and the month of November one of the most exciting times to experience the farm first-hand.

Visitors to Ben Nevis can then stroll through the orchards, taste the wines and liqueurs in the cellar, and enjoy light meals with spectacular views of the Malutis and surroundings. The experience is warm and genuine, reflecting the family's deep commitment to their land and to keeping the cherry tradition alive.

PJ — 082 458 6096



Gumtree: The Mill, the Station, and its History

Just outside Ficksburg, in the quiet community of Gumtree, stands one of South Africa's best-kept secrets — the tallest sandstone building in the country. Once a bustling grain mill owned by the S.A. Milling Company, this five-storey structure still commands attention, its weathered walls holding more than a century of local history.

The story begins in 1875, when a young Englishman named Charles Stevens arrived in Port Elizabeth with just fifty pounds in his pocket and dreams of opportunity in Basutoland (now Lesotho). Over the next 25 years, Stevens built a string of trading stores and acquired eight farms stretching across the Caledon River in the Orange Free State.

When the railway from Bloemfontein reached Ficksburg in 1907, Stevens sold a portion of his land for a new station. Legend has it that railway authorities wanted to name it "Stevenage" in his honour, but he modestly declined, and the name Gumtree was chosen — inspired, perhaps, by the eucalyptus trees growing nearby.

On a piece of land beside the new station, Stevens built his grand sandstone mill — five storeys high — under the name Schuttesdraai Milling Co. Perfectly positioned beside the railway, it even had its own coal platform and became a vital hub for grain trade in the Eastern Free State.

As the mill thrived, so did the little settlement around it. A small school opened in 1908 with 31 pupils, growing to 77 by March. Houses were built for workers, along with a sandstone home for the mill manager — still standing today. A post office, shops, a blacksmith, and even a forwarding agency followed. Gumtree became a lively community, complete with tennis courts and Saturday socials.

In 1916, the mill merged with the Bloemfontein Mill to form the Orange Free State Milling Co., and after Stevens' death in 1919, S.A. Milling took over operations. For the next four decades, the mill ran day and night — the heartbeat of Gumtree.

Today, the mill and station still stand quietly about 15 km from Ficksburg — a hauntingly beautiful reminder of a bygone era. Visitors are welcome to explore, photograph, and imagine the life that once revolved around those sandstone walls.

The Ten Windows Helen Left Behind All Saints Anglican Church, Ficksburg

If you ever find yourself in Ficksburg with a free morning, don't rush past All Saints Anglican Church. From the road it looks modest — tucked under old oaks, quiet and unassuming, built from humble mud bricks instead of sandstone. But step inside, and you'll find something completely unexpected: ten windows that seem to glow with their own kind of magic.

When sunlight streams through them, the entire church transforms. Colour spills across the pews — emerald, ruby, gold — shimmering mosaics of broken glass that dance on the walls. These are no ordinary stained-glass windows. They're a handmade legacy, created piece by piece by one woman with vision, determination, and a deep love for the land around her — Helen Alice Tennent Dickson.

Helen was born in Ficksburg in 1934 into an artistic Anglican family. She grew up naming wildflowers with her parents and carried that love of nature all her life. After art college, she became an air hostess in the golden age of flying, criss-crossing Africa when air travel still had glamour. But eventually, the skies gave way to glass and paint, and Helen returned home with a dream — to create something beautiful and lasting.

Her botanical illustrations won her recognition in Johannesburg and Stellenbosch, but it was in 1972 that she took on her most ambitious project: ten memorial windows for All Saints. Each one would honour someone from the community, using flowers native to the Ficksburg area.

It wasn't an easy start. Two years of debates with the church council passed before she finally began. And when she did, she worked alone — no studio, no assistants, just bowls of broken glass sorted by colour, industrial glue, and her own stubborn determination. She spent a year on her knees, hands raw from the glass and glue fumes, bringing her vision to life.

The results are extraordinary. Every window tells a story — a nurse's compassion, a family's loss, a grandmother's sharp wit captured in a spiky Statice. Flowers bloom in glass: proteas, aloes, rosehips, agapanthus. Even three windows from the Bishop of Blackburn connect Ficksburg to England, complete with grapes, wheat, and tiny glass hedgehogs.

Today, the windows still shine — fragile but resilient, like Helen herself. Restoration work continues quietly, preserving her legacy.

If you visit All Saints, stand in the light for a moment. You'll feel it — the warmth, the colour, and the unmistakable heartbeat of one woman's art, glowing softly in a small Free State church.

Muffy — 083 460 5842





Sandstone Estates: A Living Museum

Just outside Ficksburg, something quite extraordinary has been taking shape for the past few decades. Sandstone Estates is one of the largest and most authentic preservation projects for vintage machinery and narrow-gauge steam trains on the African continent — and it's right on our doorstep.

Back in 1995, Wilfred Mole bought the property from a local farming family, and what he's built since then is nothing short of remarkable. What started as a deep respect for the past has become an internationally recognised heritage site that draws thousands of visitors from around the world — and makes a real impact on Ficks burg and the surrounding areas.

The first big public splash was the "Great 100" — 100 vintage tractors, all pre-1970, working the fields together. It was a proper sight. Then came the "Great 400," and from there, the collection and the events just grew.

Today, Sandstone is known for its working fleet of narrow-gauge steam locomotives — and not just any engines. Among them are several Garratts, massive articulated locomotives originally designed for tough African terrain. These engines, many recovered from mines and sugarcane plantations across southern Africa, were rusting away before being brought back to life by the team at Sandstone. They now run on more than 20 km of narrow-gauge track laid through the estate, pulling restored carriages full of visitors who want to experience the golden age of steam.

But it's not only about trains.

Walk through the sheds and you'll find an entire hall of vintage cars and classic South African trucks — all immaculately restored. The tractor collection? One of the biggest you'll see in one place. All on display, lined up in rows, and each with a story to tell.

And then there's the ox-wagon. Not a small display or a static model, but a full working span — 32 Afrikaner oxen pulling a wagon just like they did a hundred years ago. You don't see that every day, not even in museums.

Sandstone opens its gates fully to the public twice a year. The Cosmos Festival takes place around Easter and celebrates the changing seasons, the beauty of the Free State countryside, and the full might of this heritage collection — engines steaming, tractors moving, oxen pulling, and more. Then in November, during the Ficksburg Cherry Festival, the estate runs the Cherry Express, a proper working steam train experience through the estate's landscape.



When these events happen, you can feel it in town. Ficksburg gets a real buzz — guest houses fill up, restaurants are packed, and everyone feels it. It brings life and business into our area in a very real way.

Sandstone doesn't just disappear between festivals. They host private events and walking tours throughout the year. While the trains don't run every day, you can still visit, walk through the collections, and get a sense of what it's all about. It's worth it.

Sandstone — 064 752 3852




JIMMIE



Pinedene Small Arms Museum – Where History Hangs on the Walls

Some places surprise you in ways you don't expect. You set out thinking you're going to see a farm museum, and instead you discover a piece of South African history carefully preserved in the Eastern Free State. That's exactly the experience at the Pinedene Small Arms Museum just outside Ficksburg.

The museum began in 1992 and today houses more than 500 firearms, all carefully displayed on the Barrett family farm. The collection is not tucked away behind glass — the rifles, pistols, and muskets line the walls in carefully arranged displays. Walk through and you'll find yourself surrounded by history: antique muskets and flintlocks, Webley pistols, Mauser rifles, Martini-actions, Lugers and Sniders, each piece telling its part in South Africa's long and complicated story. From the Basotho Wars to the Anglo-Boer War, the World Wars and the years of liberation, weapons from both sides stand side by side.

Adding to the atmosphere are remarkable military setups, along with a collection of hand-painted artworks showing uniforms of soldiers from different regiments. These paintings and displays bring a human side to the weapons — a glimpse of the people who once carried them, captured in meticulous detail. It makes the museum more than a technical collection; it becomes a visual history lesson, curated with care.

But the magic of Pinedene isn't only what hangs on the walls — it's what comes to life once a year. Every April, the farm hosts its Black Powder Shoot, a tradition going strong for more than a decade. For a day, the air fills with the thunder of muskets, the sharp crack of percussion rifles, and the smoke of antique black powder guns. It's noisy, smoky, and unforgettable, a chance to see and hear history exactly as it once was.

In addition to the museum, the farm is also home to Charlie's Cherry Liqueurs, where Charlie Barrett produces his much-loved range of cherry products. Beautifully crafted on site, his liqueurs and brandied cherries are available to purchase at the same venue, adding another layer of local flavour to the outing.

Charles— 082 897 8499









From Engineer to Cherry Alchemist – The Story of Charlie Barrett's Liqueurs

Every small town has its characters, and Ficksburg has Charlie Barrett. Ask anyone around here about cherries, and you won't just hear about the orchards, the festival, or the tarts in the coffee shops — you'll hear about Charlie and his cherry liqueurs.

The story begins in 1987, when Charlie and his wife Annette packed up their Durban life and returned to Ficksburg. Charlie was an engineer by trade, but when his father's health began to fail, duty called him back to the family farm. The problem? Farming in the Free State didn't exactly match an engineer's Durban salary. In fact, Charlie quickly discovered he'd swapped his steady income for about 10% of what he used to earn. Something had to give.

That's when a bit of backyard chemistry changed everything. Surrounded by orchards bursting with fruit, Charlie started experimenting with fermenting and distilling. What began as a basic mampoer (the traditional South African fruit spirit) soon became something far more refined. One of the turning points came thanks to an old Durban connection — the head chef of the Royal Hotel, a Swiss chef with a taste for something special. He asked Charlie if he could supply brandied cherries. The first year, Charlie delivered a single barrel. The next, five. Soon he was producing in the tens, and the idea of a new venture was born.

Here's the clever bit: when cherries sit in brandy, they shrink, leaving behind excess liquid. Most people would have poured it away. Charlie turned it into his next big idea — cherry liqueurs. What started as an experiment grew into a full-blown range: six different types of cherry liqueur, brandy liqueurs, and other fruit-based spirits, all proudly bottled under the brand name "Charlie" — a simple nod to Charles Barrett himself.

Today, on his farm Pinedene just outside Ficksburg, Charlie still makes and bottles everything by hand. Some batches take nearly a year to mature before they're ready to taste. It's patient work — but the reward is in the glass.

Visiting the farm isn't just about sampling a few liqueurs. It feels like stepping back in time, into a place where craft and tradition matter more than mass production. A tasting here can easily fill a morning or afternoon, and you leave with more than just bottles — you leave with a story.







Cherry Country's Best Pit Stops Ionia, Constantia & The Cabin – Three Reasons to Slow Down on the R26

If you're exploring the R26 through Ficksburg, you're in cherry country — and trust me, there's no reason to rush. Between orchards, mountain views, and the smell of something good cooking, this route is packed with stops worth making. Here are three you'll remember long after you've driven on.

Ionia Cherry Farmstall – Where It All Begins
Just outside Ficksburg, Ionia Cherry Farmstall captures everything locals love about the area — fresh produce, homemade treats, and warm hospitality. Out front, geese wander around the pond with the Malutis in the background. Come September, the cherry trees burst into blossom; by November, the place hums with visitors for the Cherry Crop Festival.
Inside, the shelves are a celebration of local flavour — cherry preserves, bottled fruits, and farm-baked biscuits that never last the drive home. The cherry liqueurs are the real draw: a deep red version that's rich and smooth, and a golden one made from yellow Napoleon cherries that's a little brighter and sweeter. There's even cherry gin for the curious. And if you leave without trying a waffle piled with cherries, cream, and ice cream — you've missed the point entirely.

Constantia Farmstall – The Classic Roadside Favourite
Further along the R26 towards Clocolan, Constantia Farmstall is the one that always reels you in. What started as a simple roadside stop in 2006 has grown into a full-on experience. Inside, you'll find cherry everything — from jams and sauces to cream liqueur and pure cherry juice — along with quirky gifts and handmade decor.
Outside, life slows down. Kids run wild in the play area, ducks wander the garden, and families tuck into generous plates at the café. The food here hits the sweet spot — cherry pancakes, homemade milk tart, and that famous cherry ice cream that tastes like summer in a cone. Between the orchard tours, tastings, and easy Free State charm, it's the kind of place you never regret stopping for.

The Cabin Farm Stall & Deli – Small-Town Cool

Closer to Ficksburg, The Cabin Farm Stall & Deli gives "roadside stop" a whole new meaning. It's part café, part craft store, part creative chaos — the kind of place you wander through and end up staying longer than planned.
There's great coffee, wood-fired pizza, homemade pies, and shelves packed with local crafts, sandstone figurines, and beautiful homeware. The atmosphere is relaxed, the food's honest, and the setting's pure Free State — open skies, mountain air, and friendly faces.






IONIA Cherry

Healing with Horses in Ficksburg

Just outside Ficksburg, on Rensburghoek Farm, something truly unique is happening. It's not wine, not sandstone, not cherries — but horses. Twelve of them, in fact. And not just any horses — a herd of wild Arabian horses that roam freely on the mountain above the farm, and who play an extraordinary role in helping people reconnect with themselves.

The program is called FEEL — Facilitated Equine Experiential Learning. It's run by Elsie and her daughter Salome, who are the first and only practitioners of FEEL in South Africa. They trained in Canada with Horse Spirit Connections and brought the practice home to the Free State. Today, they're offering something you won't find anywhere else in the country — holistic, nature-based therapy guided by wild horses.

Now, before you picture horseback rides or jumping fences, let's clear this up: no prior horse skills are needed. In fact, the sessions don't even start with touching the horses. Instead, you spend time observing the herd, slowly being introduced, and eventually interacting. What's fascinating is that the horses are said to "mirror" you. If you're anxious, they pick it up. If you're calm, they reflect it back. And in those moments, blocks, stresses, and even deep-rooted trauma begin to surface and shift.

Elsie explains it like this: "The horses don't lie. They cut through the noise and get straight to the heart of what's going on with you." Paired with gentle techniques from the HeartMath Institute, which studies how emotions affect the body, this experience helps people step away from stress, gain perspective, and reconnect with themselves.

It's not a quick fix or a one-off gimmick. FEEL is a journey. Over several sessions, you're guided through meeting the herd, learning about heart-brain coherence, setting boundaries, and exploring the balance between the authentic self and the false self. It's restorative, powerful, and quietly life-changing.

For anyone visiting Ficksburg, this is one of those unexpected gems — a side of the Free State you won't find in brochures. It's therapy, yes, but it's also an experience: standing among wild horses on Rensburghoek Farm, with the mountains around you, feeling nature work its quiet magic. **Elsie — 082 572 7713**



A Chocolate Journey in Ficksburg

From McKinley's Chocolate to Victoria House Chocolates

In 2013, Calen Thomas and Gavin Boy started a little adventure that would grow into something neither of them quite expected. It began in the kitchen, with a shared love of chocolate and the idea of creating something special.

Calen had trained in the art of chocolate-making with Lindt and brought with him a background in confectionery from Alaska. What started as a small venture called McKinley's Chocolate soon became a passion that took on a life of its own.

In those early days, everything was made by hand. We produced chocolate slabs, bonbons, ganaches, marshmallows, peanut brittle and delicate handmade truffles. Working mainly with 60% dark chocolate, alongside milk and white chocolate, we spent countless hours experimenting, refining recipes and getting every detail just right. There was plenty of trial and error, but that was part of the fun.

Before long, our little kitchen business had grown into a shop in Clarens, followed by a pop-up store at Garden Route Mall in George. Our chocolates found their way into markets and speciality shops across South Africa, and eventually onto the international stage at trade shows. For two people from the Eastern Free State, standing alongside some of the world's finest chocolatiers was quite something.

Then came 2020. Like so many small businesses, we were caught up in a world that suddenly stood still. Trade shows closed, international orders disappeared and, almost overnight, the business we had spent years building came to an end.

But our love for chocolate never went away. With a new chapter beginning at Victoria House in Ficksburg, McKinley's gradually evolved into Victoria House Chocolates. It felt right to bring something that had been such a big part of our lives into the home we were now sharing with our guests.

Today, chocolate is part of the Victoria House experience. Our guests will often find handmade truffles and caramels waiting for them in their rooms, a little something from our kitchen to enjoy during their stay.



We also host chocolate workshops throughout the year. These relaxed, three-hour experiences bring together tasting, learning and plenty of hands-on chocolate making. They have become popular with small groups and corporate gatherings, but you don't need a special occasion to join us. It's simply a wonderful way to spend a few hours.

For us, chocolate has always been about more than the finished product. It's about sharing, creating, learning and enjoying something together. There is nothing quite like seeing someone make their own chocolates for the first time.

If you find yourself in Ficksburg, we'd love to welcome you to Victoria House. Come and stay, join one of our workshops and become part of the story. You may arrive for a little chocolate, but hopefully you'll leave with some lovely memories too.

Gavin Boy
082 920 5551

How Susie Goodson is Growing a New Generation of Fruit Trees







When Susie Goodson (formerly Berend) packed up her life in Cape Town during the COVID years of 2020, she didn't expect to become an apple and cherry grower back in the Free State. But like many good stories, hers began with curiosity, a willingness to learn, and plenty of determination.

She moved back to her family's farm outside Ficksburg, near Gumtree — land that's been in the Berend family for generations. Her brother, Chris Berend, is a nurseryman and apple grower, so it didn't take long before Susie got caught up in the world of fruit trees herself. If you've driven the R26 between Clocolan and Ficksburg, you'll have seen those long stretches of netted orchards — that's part of Caledon Valley Nursery .What started as a small personal project of 50 apple trees soon grew into something much bigger. With Chris's guidance, Susie began focusing on dwarfing rootstocks — compact trees that thrive in smaller spaces but still produce full-sized, high-quality fruit. Her main varieties are apples and cherries, particularly the hardy Lapins cherry, known for its strong growth and excellent yields in cooler climates.

Today, Susie and her team specialize in the production of premium apple and cherry trees on dwarfing rootstocks. These trees are of agricultural-grade quality, expertly budded onto clonal, tissue culture rootstocks to ensure uniformity, vigour, and performance. Traditionally, this standard of tree was reserved for commercial growers — but thanks to a family relationship with Caledon Valley Nursery, Susie is now releasing a limited selection of open cultivar varieties to the domestic market for the first time.

Perfecting the process hasn't been without its challenges. The team has worked hard to adapt commercial growing techniques to smaller retail bags, learning how to balance temperature, soil, and growth conditions to keep the trees healthy. Each season brings noticeable improvement as they refine their approach — and the results are strong, easy-to-care-for, high-yielding trees ideal for urban and home gardeners. They grow beautifully in containers, patios, and smaller gardens, giving anyone the chance to harvest homegrown fruit of commercial quality.

Susie's next goal is to take her passion further — into schools. She hopes to help establish food gardens and teach children the basics of sustainable growing, encouraging a hands-on understanding of where food comes from.

Her broader mission is clear: to produce the best quality fruit trees possible, trees that will live long, strong, and productive lives — some likely outlasting the people who plant them.

It's a story rooted in perseverance, family, and a genuine love for growing things — proof that even with a few setbacks and a steep learning curve, something remarkable can grow when the right person puts their hands in the soil. **Suzie — 082 974 5463**

Wine, Warmth, and a Mad Englishman in the Vrystaat

You wouldn't expect to find a vineyard in the Eastern Free State — let alone a good one. The winters bite hard, the frost clings to the soil, and most would laugh off the idea. But not John Critchley. Locals call him the mal Engelsman — the mad Englishman — and after an afternoon with him, glass of red in hand, you start to understand why. He's not just growing grapes outside Fouriesburg; he's growing something few would dare to attempt — Free State wine with real soul.

John and his wife Trish came here after losing everything in a fire at their guesthouse in St Francis Bay. Most would have walked away, but they started over. Friends pointed them to Fouriesburg, where they restored an old sandstone farmhouse, built cottages, and began a new chapter — The Rose House.

At first they thought they might grow lavender, but the frost had other ideas. So John, a long-time amateur winemaker, decided to try something wilder. Inspired by high-altitude vineyards in Argentina, he planted Pinotage, Pinot Noir, and Shiraz — just over a thousand vines. Against all odds, they thrived.

Today, he produces about 3,000 bottles of soft, gentle red wine under the Bald Ibis label. Everything is done by hand, the vineyard fed by fresh spring water from the sandstone cliffs. It's not flashy — it's honest.

And then there's the real magic — when you visit. You drive up a quiet gravel road to a small sandstone restaurant beside the vines. Inside, Trish and John welcome you like old friends. Trish's food isn't fancy; it's proper, heartwarming fare. Her lamb pie alone could win medals — rich, savoury, unforgettable. She makes her own pasta, too, perfect with a glass of their Pinotage.

They'll tell you their story while you taste their wines. The sun pours through the windows, birds hop around outside — bokmakieries and robins waiting for crumbs — and beyond them, the Maluti Mountains stretch into the distance. After a cold snap, you might even spot snow on the peaks.
It's not a polished wine estate. It's better — small, personal, and full of heart. Every bottle carries their story, and every visit feels like a reunion with old friends.
Before you leave, browse their little shelf of homemade jams, rusks, and preserves — proper padkos for the road. If you're ever near Fouriesburg, or even coming from Ficksburg, stop by The Rose House. Come for the wine, stay for the story, and leave a little fuller than when you arrived.
Trish —072 142 3183







Highland Essential Oils – Capturing the Scents of the Eastern Free State

Apart from its mountains and wide-open countryside, the Eastern Free State has a quiet way of surprising you. It's not only the scenery that flourishes here, but also roses, irises, and herbs that thrive in the highland air.

Just outside Clocolan lies Highland Essential Oils, a family-run farm turning these fragrant plants into some of South Africa's finest essential oils and perfumes. It's a working farm, but it feels more like a story of patience, craftsmanship, and respect for nature.

The moment you drive through the gate, the perfume of Bulgarian roses fills the air. Beyond the gate, soft pinks and lilacs of irises stretch across the land — their colour and scent could belong to a summer field in Europe.

Inside the distillery, owner Flip Minnaar keeps a watchful eye on the copper stills, filled with thousands of rose petals gathered before sunrise when their oils are strongest. His son Henry explains how iris roots take nine years before a single drop of oil can be extracted — a reminder of how slow, beautiful things take time.

Even the humble khakibos, often dismissed as a weed, has found purpose here. Its oil is used by international fragrance houses as a carrier — a Free State plant with a global story.

Most of Highland's rose oil is exported to Germany for pharmaceuticals and fine perfumes, but visitors can experience it right on the farm. Their shop offers handmade soaps, body products, and bath washes created from their own oils.

Everything at Highland is organic, distilled on-site, and done with care. Guided tours and workshops reveal how essential oils are made, blended, and even linked to ancient traditions.

It's a place that captures the Free State's quiet beauty — proof that patience, passion, and a little soil can produce something truly extraordinary.

Contact: Riana – 082 789 3035





Hidden Treasure in Ficksburg: The S.H. Pellissier Art Gallery

Most people pass through Ficksburg without realising that behind the old sandstone walls of the primary school lies one of the Eastern Free State's great cultural treasures — the S.H. Pellissier Art Gallery. It's not open to the public, and you won't find much about it online, but what's inside is extraordinary: J.H. Pierneef's first public art commission, painted in 1922 — eight large mural panels and a frieze that predate his famous landscapes.

The story began after the First World War when Ficksburg's schools were overflowing. A new building was planned, complete with a full school hall — an unusual feature at the time. The architects, F. Masey and Harrisson, were instructed by Dr. S.H. Pellissier, the headmaster, and Reenen J. van Reenen, Director of Public Works, to include murals inspired by San rock art, a shared passion of theirs.

Pierneef, who had earlier stayed with van Reenen while lecturing on San art, was commissioned for the task. He arrived in Ficksburg in March 1922, stayed with Dr. Pellissier, and completed the murals within a month for a fee of £75 — travel included. Working from tracings and manuscripts by early San art researchers like George Stow and Dorothea Bleek, Pierneef adapted ancient rock art motifs into tall vertical compositions. He borrowed details from sites such as Modderpoort, Zastron, and Rouxville, transforming hunters, eland, and shamanic figures into something uniquely stylised and symbolic.

Despite injuring his back in a fall from the scaffolding, Pierneef finished the work in time for the hall's grand opening. The panels remain in remarkable condition a century later, preserved by the thick sandstone walls and soft natural light.

From 1927 onward, each matric class at Ficksburg High donated a painting to the school, building a remarkable collection over the decades. When the school later relocated and merged with the technical school, the original hall — with its Pierneef murals — became part of Ficksburg Primary. In 1980, the space was officially named the S.H. Pellissier Art Gallery, complete with a bronze bust of Dr. Pellissier donated by that year's matric class.

Much of the gallery's preservation and historical record is thanks to Renette Humphreys, who compiled its history and ensured the collection was safeguarded. Today, the gallery houses around 70 original works by some of South Africa's most celebrated artists — including Pierneef, Boonzaaier, T. de Jongh, Coetzer, Canitz, and Terence McCaw.

Quietly tucked away behind the school gates, the S.H. Pellissier Art Gallery remains one of Ficksburg's proudest cultural landmarks — a rare space where art, history, and heritage meet. Viewings are by appointment only, but it's well worth making the call.
Johan — 066 226 6727





Ficksburg and the Boer War: Stories from the Edge of an Empire

If you stand at the foot of Imperani today, looking out across the fertile fields and sandstone ridges, it's hard to imagine that this quiet corner of the Free State was once the scene of turmoil during the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902). Yet, tucked away in reports, diaries, and scattered photographs, Ficksburg's story in the war comes alive — not as a grand, sweeping battle, but as a series of hard, human moments that left scars on both land and people.

In September 1900, British troops under Maj-Gen BBD Campbell descended on Middleton's farm, Brindisi, near Ficksburg. What followed was devastation: threshing machines smashed, wagons seized, hundreds of cattle and horses driven off, and families uprooted. Among the spoils were the legendary "Middleton horses," a bloodline that would have shaped the Boerperd breed for generations. Their loss is still remembered as a blow to South African horse-breeding — proof that war rarely ends with just soldiers paying the price.

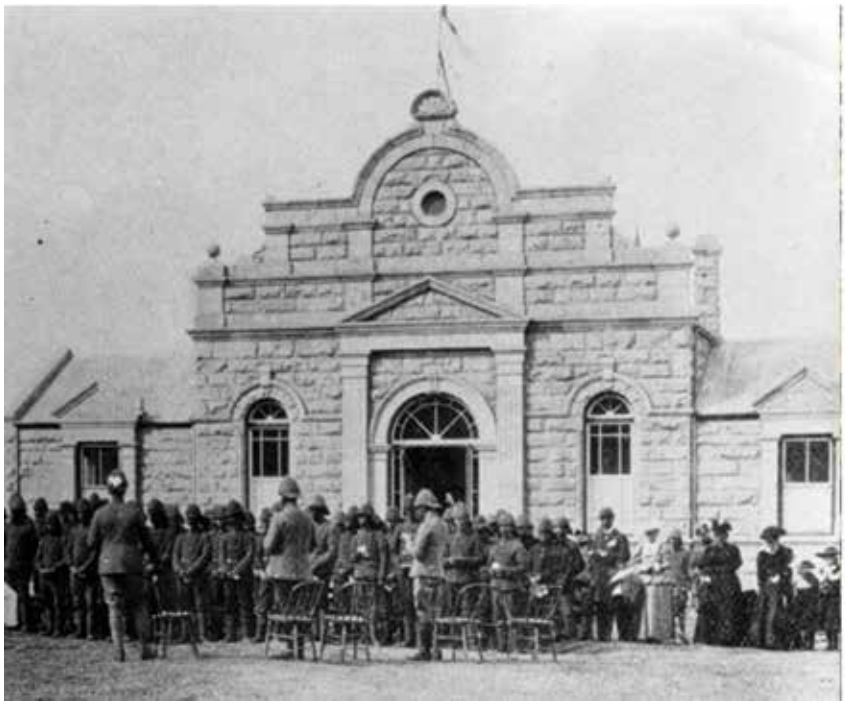
The countryside here was not spared the grim tactics of "scorched earth." By 1902, blockhouse lines stretched across the veld, strangling movement and hemming in Boer commandos. Farms were burned, families displaced, and the nearby concentration camps swelled with both White and Black civilians caught in the tide of war. Death rates in those camps tell a story that numbers alone can't — especially the children who never came home.

Yet the Ficksburg district also witnessed moments of fierce resistance. Comdt E. van Niekerk led raids and ambushes around the town, catching British columns by surprise. One such clash at Olivier's Farm in April 1902 saw young Charlie van Aardt, barely more than a boy, fighting alongside seasoned burghers. He fell in that skirmish, remembered as a "penkop" who stood his ground against the might of the Empire.

There were also battles fought on Ficksburg's doorstep. In June 1900, Gen. (Rev.) PH Roux, with 200 burghers, attempted to seize the Sand River bridge. Warned by a traitor, the British garrison was ready, and the Free Staters paid dearly — lives lost, men captured, and the bitter taste of betrayal.

Ficksburg itself became a posting for the British Staffordshire Yeomanry and Mounted Infantry, who were stationed here during the later stages of the war. Alongside these troops, local figures like Mousley — remembered as a smous (travelling trader) rather than a soldier — appear in the stories of the time. Their names remind us that this was not only a garrison town but also a community where soldiers, civilians, and traders were thrown together by circumstance.

Looking back, these fragments of Ficksburg's Boer War story are not tales of sweeping victory or defeat, but of survival. Families lost farms, soldiers fought from ridge to ridge, and communities endured hunger, fear, and unimaginable grief. And yet, from those ashes, Ficksburg continued.







Churches & Pipe Organs

There are also two beautiful churches worth visiting. The Anglican Church will be open during the same hours, with a small donation welcome. It is particularly worth visiting for its remarkable windows, designed by Helen Tennant and made from beautiful pieces of coloured glass. These unique windows are a special feature of the church and well worth taking the time to admire. Visitors will also be able to enjoy a recording of the church's magnificent organ music.

The NG Church will also open its doors, with George Pieterson welcoming visitors to see its pipe organ. There will be a recording of organ music for visitors to enjoy. If you appreciate church architecture, beautiful windows and musical heritage, both churches are certainly worth a visit.
And there's still more happening around town

Muffy — 083 460 5842 Anglican Church
George — 082 455 7727 NG Church

Establishment contact numbers

Bella Rosa Guest House	051 933 2623 063 516 7759	3-Star
Bellevue Rooms	083 461 1575	
Boschfontein Mountain Lodge	0726210674	
Cherry Lane Guesthouse	0825203426	4-Star
Die Kersiehuis Guest House	082 553 2262	
Ficksburg Country Cottage	079 664 7315	
Green Acorn Guest House	082 828 8381	
Imperani Guest House	051 933 3606 082 448 8044	4-Star
Jwalaboholo Mountain View Guesthouse	0602596735	
Moolmanshoek Private Nature Reserve	051 933 2220 073 026 2559	
Nebo Mountain Lodge	0837665552	
Oregon Cottage Guest House	051 933 4849 082 500 8583	
Rensburghoek Guest Farm	082 572 7713 079 519 6595	
Saxon Park Farm Cottage	083 457 8278 083 462 7476	
Spring Water Cottages	082 611 5254	
Tempelhof Game Farm	051 933 3973 0715319879	
Valuta Farm	082 950 3042 WhatsApp only	
Victoria House	Guest House 082 920 5551	4-Star
Vinkel & Koljander	081 770 5016	
Woodpecker Guest House	073 160 9382	3 Star

Where to Eat

If you're looking for somewhere to enjoy a meal during the festival, The Blikplek at Green Acorn Guest House is well worth a visit. They will be offering their own menu and a selection of festival activities.
While you're there, take some time to browse the vintage tinware created by Sandra Netherlands. It's a rather special collection and certainly worth stopping to admire.
Imperani Guest House will also be opening its restaurant, where visitors can enjoy meals during the festival.
Apart from these two establishments, Ficksburg has a number of takeaway outlets and fast-food options, so there are plenty of choices if you're looking for something quick and casual.
So, when you're in Ficksburg for the Cherry Festival, take a little time to explore beyond the main festival attractions. Wander through our gardens, visit our historic buildings, discover our local businesses and enjoy the warm hospitality of our community.
We hope you have a wonderful stay, enjoy everything the festival has to offer and, most importantly, come back to visit us outside festival weekend. Ficksburg and the surrounding area have so much more to offer throughout the year.

Ficksburg —

The Cherry Capital

A town of many possibilities

Facts about Ficksburg

Did you know that the sandstone used to build the Union Buildings in Pretoria came from Ficksburg?

What is now the Setsoto Municipality's head office building was originally built by Sentraoes, then the largest hail insurance company in the world.

The old sandstone mill outside Ficksburg is the highest sandstone building in the world.

Ficksburg is the only town in South Africa where the border post is situated in the town.

Attractions in Ficksburg

The CR Swart prison, a national heritage site, is where the first State President, CR Swart, spent three nights in jail.

The All Saints' Anglican Church's windows have become a world class attraction.

The Pellissier Art Gallery has wall panels and a frieze painted by Pierneef.

The Ficksburg Airfield has the second longest runway in the Free State, after Bloemfontein's Bram Fischer Airport

Ficksburg is also known as the Cherry Capital of the World,

Ficksburg has one of the prettiest town squares in South Africa, where all the buildings are built from sandstone.

Ficksburg is also the gateway to Lesotho and the Katse Dam. The town was the base for the construction of the dam.

Ficksburg sits at the foot of the Imperani Mountain, offering spectacular views across to the Maluti Mountains in Lesotho.

