

Taking Karoo History into the Future

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With much of the Great Karoo under threat from uranium mining and fracking, efforts are being made, through various projects, to ensure the heritage of the region is preserved for future generations. Recently one such project undertook to digitally record a portion of the unique corbelled houses of the Upper Karoo using a high tech laser scanner.

Under the umbrella of the Northern Cape Environmental Heritage Trust and with funding obtained from the National Lotteries Commission (NLC) a number of these dwellings underwent the laser treatment. With few laser scanning experts in the country a small team from the African Conservation Trust (ACT) had to be brought in from KZN to do the job.

"Using the laser scanner we can digitally capture an accurate 3D dataset which combines the interior and exterior of the original dwelling," says Carl Grossmann Chairman of ACT.

The scanner can record, through its rapidly spinning green 'eye', up to 50 000 points per second. From the final 3D image there are various options possible including the production of a comprehensive building plan, which would enable artisans to rebuild the dwelling to within a few millimetres of the original.

The name, corbelled house, is derived from the method of

construction known as 'corbelling', an ancient technique carried out by laying courses of flat stone, each successive one protruding a little further inward than the one preceding it.

Surrounded by a certain amount of intrigue the Corbelled houses of the upper Karoo are an integral part of the cultural heritage of the region and only occur between the towns of Loxton, Carnarvon, Williston and Fraserburg. Built by the *Trekboers* who ventured north of the Cape Colony from the beginning of the 19th Century it is thought the first dwellings came into being between 1811 and 1815, with the majority originating between the second and third quarter of the 19th century. It is not certain who built the first one, or how the technique arrived in the area.

"The final 3D images will be made available to The South African Heritage Resources Authority (SAHRA). This will assist them in meeting their mandate of populating and expanding the national inventory of heritage resources, and ensuring that these recordings are made available to all South Africans.

With around 130 corbelled houses known to exist, there are many more that need to be documented. However, continuation of this project is dependent on further funding.

