

AfrikaBurn: fiery embers of Tankwa Town

 By [Ruth Cooper](#)

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All good stories should include a worthwhile journey and a journey to the arid semi-desert, mood-swinging Karoo is no stroll on the promenade. It takes preparation; it takes perseverance and, most of all, a high level of concentration. One-hundred-and-thirteen kilometres along a congested dirt road is disheartening for most brave souls, many great steeds have fallen by the wayside, succumbing to the vision-impairing, all-encompassing dust clouds and tyre-ravenous earth. If you rallied and were victorious, congratulations you have made it to the Promised Land, worth every minute of dirt road cursing and near accident. Welcome to Tankwa Town, hope you packed wisely ...

Enthusiasm, participation, creativity, openness and sunscreen are a necessity; commodification, inhibitions, ego, conservativeness and Rufus, your beloved Labrador, can be left at the gate. "Open your mind. Let us begin our quest."





AfrikaBurn is not just a festival; it's a way of life - a window into a world of selfless collaboration and liberation. For a few days once a year, like-minded creatives, hippies, artists, musicians, performers, exhibitionists, eco warriors and many more gather forces to celebrate and pay homage to life and death in this temporary city upon the Karoo plains and beneath the star-infested skies. The artworks are transient, ultimately created for destruction; their fiery demise their creative climax and their gift to all Burners.

Mystical mayhem snapshots

It's impossible to capture the immenseness of AfrikaBurn at the time or in retrospect when putting finger to key. Six days and five nights, an expansive camp site, countless artworks and even more daily and nightly performances, activities and activations, you just breathe in the immediate snippets that you can letting the hustle and bustle of Tankwa Town wash over and envelop you in its loving embrace. Time is elastic, the programme of events a vague guideline. Schedule? What schedule? Who needs one? Here a few snapshots of just a fraction of the mystical mayhem.



Friday night-ish and a life-size Tyrannosaurus Rex awakens roused by the flames that snake up his tail and throughout his body. He sniffs the air, smelling peacock on the menu, turning his monstrous head he spots his prey. Poor peacock mutant

vehicle you better pray to your avian gods for redemption. Tyres spin in the dust, purple plumage streams behind as she scrambles for her life. T Rex is nipping at your tail feathers, better motor. Around and around they dance, T Rex casually loping along, just a few whispers away from devouring. But what's this? T Rex's gait is slowing, his flame fading, he utters one last roar before coming to a standstill. Oh lucky, lucky Ms Peacock - you have escaped the fiery jaws tonight, you shall live to tell another tale and dance another dance. Ms Peacock, with a flourish, pirouettes off into the night, lucky to survive.





Binnekring blustering

Earlier that day a sandstorm and gentle rain join the party. Dust swirls, clouds gather, badass mothers with Matrix cloaks and makeshift bandanna face masks zoom by on motorised skateboards, joining the rebellious group of rusted and spike-adorned mutant vehicles gutturally rewing and churning the earth. "Eat my dust Burn babies!" Some run for shelter, others revel in the drama of it all; a group of rain dancers have gathered, stomping the earth and throwing their hands up to the heavens. It's all gone a little Mad Max.



Saturday night and the time is ripe, the evening is full of expectation and cannabis smoke, all previous nights and Burns were just a warm-up, a test run for the main Burn, the main attraction. Fire worshippers gather around the iconic eight-

legged San Clan revelling in the ignition and chanting on the inflammation. As the fire burns down the circle shrinks (Make the circle smaller!), the crowd edging closer and closer to the still-ferocious heat. This is the time the exhibitionists come out to play. Clothes drop and a brave group expose their naked bodies to the flames and eyes of the gatherers. Whooping and dancing around the fiery embers they worship the art, the earth and the sweet blessed life that we have all been graced with.





Gift-giving gods

Later-ish, when to tent we have retreated, an explosion of giant proportions wakes us. A man is yelling over the speakerphone: "Bring me your glass bottles!" No wait, wake up sleep-addled brain, that can't be right, he's shouting: "Remove your gas canisters!" Something is burning that shouldn't be and, peering out between tent flaps, it seems dangerously close to our camping area. The main AfrikaBurn Kitchen is flame engulfed; a rouge gas canister explodes adding voice to the mayhem. The following day when doing our usual morning Tankwa Town stroll we spot a sign outside the volunteer tent: "The kitchen burnt down last night, donations welcome." Already a sizeable amount of food has gathered beneath the sign. This prize example of the generous and rallying spirit that permeates AfrikaBurn, what's mine is yours and vice versa. The amount of selfless effort that volunteers and attendees go to warms your heart and inspires you to be a better person. Be it a coffee shop saloon, serving piping hot cappuccinos and homemade bread, a themed campsite equipped with porta pool and DIY cocktails, yoga classes, a topless pancake-serving cowgirl or back-flip lessons. The act of gifting a stranger with nothing expected in return is really what makes this festival unique and sets it apart from anything else you've ever experienced.

And if it's something you have yet to experience, I highly recommend you do - just don't forget your moisturiser.



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