

# A sustainable lifestyle on a small, off-the-grid farm

After spending seven years in Zithulele and three in Cebe in rural Eastern Cape, **Karen and Roger Galloway** bought Heartwood Homestead, a small farm close to East London. Here, they practise regenerative agriculture and use their resources to benefit others through an internship programme. **Wouter Kriel** reports.

## FAST FACTS

Roger and Karen Galloway spent 10 years in the former Transkei, where they came across many people working 2ha plots.

The Galloways are experimenting with what can be done on a 4ha mixed-farming operation using ultra-high-density strip grazing.

Through their internship programme, they want to be part of the solution to some of South Africa's problems.

“When Roger and I lived in Zithulele and Cebe, I worked as a physiotherapist in the public health sector, and

Roger, a graphic designer, worked in the NGO sector doing development work,” recalls Karen Galloway. Karen and her husband Roger own Heartwood Homestead near East London, where they practise regenerative agriculture. But it was while working in Zithulele and Cebe that the couple witnessed the challenges faced by rural people, many of whom work on 2ha allotments to supplement their income.

“In that sense, Heartwood Homestead is our experiment in self-sustained and off-grid living,” explains Karen.

Heartwood is a 20ha property, with 4ha of arable land, which overlooks the Gonubie River. When the Galloways bought it in 2019, there was no infrastructure, and Roger managed the

construction of their house, the guest house and the workshop. “I enjoy carpentry. It’s one of those things that started as an interest, then it became a hobby, and now it’s a business,” says Roger.

## OFF-GRID LIVING

The farm is completely off-grid for water, electricity, and sewerage. The Galloways store up to 80 000m<sup>3</sup> of rainwater and use solar power.

When it came to deciding on a power source, the couple carried out a cost comparison.

“On the one hand, there was Eskom, which charges an exorbitant connection fee and monthly line rentals, with the possibility of load-shedding. On the other hand, a family member installs solar-power systems, and they offered us a good deal, so we opted for that,” says Roger.

They installed a 5kW inverter with 15 solar panels. Electricity is stored in lithium-ion batteries with a total capacity of 20kWh.

“We currently use only about 30% of what we generate, and that includes electricity for all the power tools in the workshop, the guest house and the main house,” says Roger.

He constructed dry compost toilets in all the buildings, and the system works well and with minimal maintenance. They use sawdust from the carpentry workshop and occasionally the ash from wood fires. “We’re reliant on stored rainwater for all our needs, so flush toilets don’t make sense in our situation. But it goes further than that; we really believe it’s a better [option] for everyone, no matter their access to water. We’re compost toilet system evangelists! It closes the nutrient cycle, you don’t use any water, you never need a plumber, and there’s no splashing or unpleasant odours,” says Roger.

## ULTRA-HIGH-DENSITY GRAZING

Karen manages the farm’s livestock component. “My physiotherapy training has given me a good understanding of anatomy and basic health issues affecting the animals,” she says.

