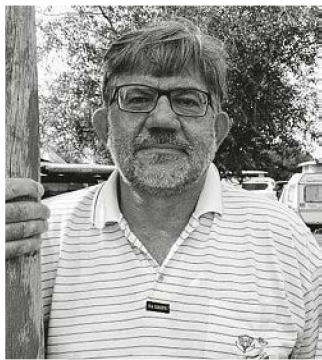




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NEELS' RALLY TENT



Where there's smoke...

It's always fun to listen to people arguing about which wood or briquettes make the best braai coals, says Neels van Heerden.

Camping and braais go hand in hand, and it just seems to be human nature to quarrel over what the best fuel is for making braai coals. I think there's consensus that gas is best for a breakfast of bacon, eggs, mushrooms, tomatoes and more. The big debate rages over the rest of the day's meals. Wood, charcoal or briquettes bring to the fore everyone's own preferences and theories. In the Western Cape, decent braai wood is apparently rare, but rooikrans, camel thorn, eucalyptus and grapevines are popular. Those living in the northwest of the country will tell you that corn cobs make the best coals. Everybody probably does his thing in his own way.

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Researchers have found that braai fires do not pose any noticeable health risk.

In and around Gauteng, sickle bush is well known, but the big problem is finding a bag with fairly dry wood in a huge pile of bags. In Limpopo, mopane is often used as firewood, but stay

away from tamboti. It's not only a protected tree species, but its smoke is toxic. In KZN, wattle is very popular. Leadwood is often offered for sale at road stalls, but as far as I know it is also a protected tree species. I believe businessmen who profit from harvesting protected tree species need to be taken to task. **THE STRIFE ABOUT** whether it's charcoal or briquettes that produce the best coals won't be settled anytime soon. People even argue over which supermarket's house brand is best. Recently I saw someone announcing on social media that charcoal from Namibia should be boycotted, because South African Rands are being wasted to import thousands of bags. Someone else questioned whether our neighbouring country is actually capable of producing several tonnes of charcoal because there are apparently too few trees there. Not so. Namibia has a healthy charcoal-manufacturing initiative that is managed by the country's government under the auspices of the Namibian Charcoal Association. Invasive tree species, especially acacia, are eradicated and processed into charcoal. More than half of Namibia is covered in thornbushes that

use up groundwater, which results in less rainwater being absorbed into the soil to sustain native grasses. Currently, there are more than 650 Namibian entrepreneurs who manufacture charcoal. An astounding 600 km² of densely wooded and overgrown areas are "grown" annually. **IF YOU'RE WORRIED** about any negative effects caused by the smoke from tens of thousands of campers' braai fires – or about the impact of turning wood into charcoal on the environment – I have interesting news. In an article titled *Plume Characterisation of a Typical South African Braai*, researchers from the North West University in South Africa and the University of Helsinki in Finland found that braai fires do not pose any noticeable health risks. So, light your braai without a care. (Do note, however, that amateurs who produce charcoal may suffer health problems if they inhale too much smoke on a daily basis.) In the meantime, it is still entertaining to listen to people arguing whether rooikrans, grapevines, sickle bush or wattle produce the best braai coals. It is soul-enriching to braai when you're out camping, but it can also be a challenge to keep everyone happy.