

# the 1<sup>st</sup> olive festival

. . . a growing legacy



The  
RIEBEECK  
VALLEY  
*Olive*  
FESTIVAL  
4<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> May  
2002

“The real  
olive festival”

CELEBRATING *Olives*

- fun • food
- adventure
- art • markets
- wine • music
- drama
- workshops
- everything  
you need  
to know  
about Olives

For further details –  
Tel: 022-487 1133  
Fax: 022-448 1628  
Email: [julie@riebeek-kasteel.co.za](mailto:julie@riebeek-kasteel.co.za)

*Riebeeck Valley*  
TOURISM

booking essential

The second year followed a similar style to the first.

*noboundariescape*

The Riebeeck Valley Olive Festival has become one of the most successful pillars in the Western Cape calendar of events.

Beginning in 2001, its only rival outside the city of Cape Town was the already established festival in Prince Albert. That event, however, was too far from the city to successfully attract large numbers of visitors so it had a substantially different target market.

The brainchild of the then owners of the Riebeeck Olive Boutique, Juliana and Mike Meredith, they set out to involve local businesses to join them in sponsoring, marketing, and promoting the fledgling concept. One must remember that the villages were still limited regarding venues, so it was very much rooting around to make sure enough was on offer and to ensure the area looked its best.

As the designated dates drew near there was much preparation, cleaning and generally getting everything in order. There were no references so even though plenty of research had been done there was a certain amount of speculation. Who would come, and how many? The first weekend in May had been selected as the optimum time when locally grown olives would be ready, a critical factor.

I had two rôles to play: firstly as the owner of a gallery/coffee shop **ARTorchard** (the only one in town) I had to ensure that it was stocked with art and merchandise, and that we had enough food and drink to serve potential customers. Family and friends were roped in to help. My secondary function was to help Christine Atkinson, a local with marketing experience, prepare publicity and most of all, a newspaper, appropriately called **The Olive Press** to cover the event.

Christine had a useful contact – her partner was Ashraf Jamal, the well known author and he agreed to write an introduction on olives.

We compiled all the information we could on local involvement and included a programme. Strikingly, with the exception of wine tasting, virtually every activity involved olives! This aspect was to change radically over the years.

The Friday evening before the weekend arrived, together with a huge cold front. We battened down the hatches and prepared for the worst. Throughout a very frigid night it rained heavily and in the morning, through breaks in the cloud cover, we could see that the surrounding mountains were capped with snow. To cap it all a ferocious wind was howling. Putting up a gazebo outside became a major challenge.

Throughout the day there was only trickle of visitors – who could have expected more to venture out in such conditions? By closing time there was a slight feeling of despondency. For me, little had sold in the gallery and the huge supply of cakes and coffee brought in had hardly been touched. Late in the afternoon the weather began clearing so we held our collective breath for the next day.

It began with vivid, blue skies. We readied ourselves once again. Until mid-morning it remained calm, then, as if some magic switch had been flipped, visitors just poured in. We only just managed to keep our feet on the ground, clearing up in the gaps between onslaughts. All the time I could glimpse people walking out of the gallery clutching wrapped parcels.

The plan had been for everyone involved in the festival to gather at the Arts Inn (now **Kasteelberg Country Inn & Bistro**) to wind down and discuss their relative experiences. But the bunch of bedraggled, exhausted business owners and helpers that turned up only managed a single drink before slinking off for much earned rest.



The first Olive Press took the form of a newspaper



Vineyards provided a perfect place to chill out

From that point the Olive Festival has just grown exponentially. The estimate of numbers for the first event was about 2 000; now talk is in the region of ten times that number. Of necessity the spread of merchandise and area has increased with the volume and it is a much more diverse occasion now, still on the first weekend of May yearly.