

# THE RIEL RENAISSANCE



*One of the oldest dance forms in South Africa is making a comeback, uplifting local children, and shining on the world's stage. Troupe manager and dance coach Floris Smith shares more...*

Die Nuwe Graskoue Trappers at Bushmans

## **What is Riel dancing?**

It's a rural dance created by the workers of the greater Cape Colony of old, including the Winelands, Garden Route, Kalahari, and Karoo. It has its roots in the storytelling dances of the Khoi and San. The music has come a long way since then – it's rhythmic, fast, and fun. You can't help but dance when you hear it!

## **Why do you think the dance is still popular today?**

There isn't much for youth to do in remote rural areas, so it's mainly danced in these rural communities. When ATKV took the initiative to launch a project and host a championship, this inspired many to take part. Lots of workshops and training sessions created mass interest at schools and other communities, and the opportunity of becoming champions was also motivational for the kids and dancers.

## **When you are not coaching, what are you doing?**

I work as Executive Chef and Deputy General Manager at Bushmans Kloof Wilderness Reserve & Wellness Retreat in the Cederberg. All my spare time is dedicated to the Riel Dance Project! Bushmans Kloof is proud of what our Riel Troupe has achieved and what it has meant to the local community, and so they are accommodating when I need to travel with the group for dance competitions and performances.

## **What difficulties has the troupe experienced so far?**

These communities are self-sustained, and kids spend their time with livestock or in the vegetable gardens, on the Rooibos tea lands, or gathering wood after school or on weekends. Access to sports clubs is almost non-existent. But the most challenging aspect sustaining the project is of a financial nature,

as with any projects. Because the dancers are based at villages around Wupperthal, getting them all at a central point for training and rehearsals is sometimes challenging due to the transport and road constraints (mainly handmade rough gravel roads).

## **How did it feel to perform at the World Championship of Performing Arts?**

Winning awards has opened so many doors for the project, especially for Die Nuwe Graskoue Trappers. They get to perform at many festivals, functions, and special events as the dance has become so popular over the years. The Riel is part of the culture that the kids grow up with; they know the steps and the rhythms by heart. It's owned by these communities. Children learn to do it in schools, and it's being celebrated as a heritage worth appreciating.

***“The Riel is part of the culture...owned by these communities...and it’s being celebrated as a heritage worth appreciating.”***



Performing at the ATKV

Image courtesy of Jean du Plessis

***How did it feel to win the awards?***

It’s the ultimate reward! We can hold our heads up high now knowing that we’ve shown the world that we’re among the best of the best. Our Gold and Silver medals belong not only to us but also to the community of Wupperthal, to Bushmans Kloof and its owners the Tollman family, and to all the people of South Africa who believed in us and supported us. Thank you. You gave us the wings to fly. 🦋

*For the latest updates, follow Die NuweGraskoue Trappers and Wupperthal BK Riel Family on Facebook or visit [www.bushmanskloof.co.za](http://www.bushmanskloof.co.za).*



Die Nuwe Graskoue Trappers

Image courtesy of Jean du Plessis

[www.onroutemag.co.za](http://www.onroutemag.co.za)