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Merrifield girl jumps for joy - page 3

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Trucks hit by thieves

BY JON HOUZET and PETER MARTIN

FREQUENT in-transit robberies at the Chalumna Pass on the R72 between Port Elizabeth and East London have resulted in local truck drivers stopping using the route, even though it means a loss in business.

Two long-distance truck drivers from Port Alfred recently related their experiences on the steep section of road that requires many trucks to slow to a snail's pace, presenting an easy target to criminal gangs.

"I've been robbed four times on that pass," Rudi van der Merwe said.

"When you have to go slowly up that hill [the robbers] run and climb on the truck. They cut the sails or break open the containers. They've taken [cargo of] electrical generators, sugar, coffee," he said.

Van der Merwe said pineapple trucks were a popular target, as the gang would just toss the pineapples out as the truck moved.

"Those same pineapples are used to smash windcreens," he said.

Van der Merwe described the gang's other tactics which sounded like something out of *The Fast and the Furious*.

"These guys are so jacked up if they can't climb up [on foot], they drive behind with a bakkie and a ladder and get on the truck that way. They use a battery-operated grinder to cut open the container," he said.

Another trucker, Javon Eaton, was attacked in the pass while transporting a load of cabbages on October 25.

"At about 6.30pm, I was coming over the Keiskamma Bridge just before Chalumna. I saw a group of men standing on a ridge on the side of the

R72 route a no-go for some companies

road," he said. "They threw rocks - one smashed the windscreen and others damaged the bodywork."

"I got angry and stopped, which I shouldn't have done. There was just me and my assistant against 10 to 15 of these guys. One hit me on the shoulder with a rod. I could have lost my life," Eaton said.

Both Eaton and Van der Merwe said a security company had a vehicle sta-

// Those same pineapples are used to smash windcreens

tioned just before the pass and offered the service of following trucks through the pass for a fee - between R50 and R120 per truck.

But Van der Merwe said even that was no guarantee of a safe journey through the hazardous stretch.

Eaton said: "This stuff shouldn't be happening on a national road. You shouldn't have to pay private security". It has put him off from making the trip again.

Van der Merwe also abandoned the route some time ago.

Now he only does deliveries within East London and from East London to Stutterheim, Komga and King William's Town.

Rodney van Schalkwyk of Stander's Transport said on one occasion one of his trucks parked on the side of the road in that area waiting for the secu-

rity vehicle. It was dark, and some looters managed to steal some cooldrinks Stander's truck was transporting. They now regularly make use of security vehicles to escort the trucks when travelling through the area.

However, Tarps and Canvas of Braelyn, East London may have the answer to all the truckers' problems.

According to owner Clayton Heyns, they have patented an electrified tarpaulin which gets connected to the truck's battery and which has already proven to be successful in thwarting would-be robbers.

"The looters get a shock similar to that from an electrified fence," said Katy Heyns, spokesperson for Tarps and Canvas. Both Clayton and Katy emphasised that each truck using their product had to, by law, carry a sign on it indicating there was an electrified tarpaulin on board.

Police spokesperson Lieutenant-Colonel Mtati Tana said: "SAPS are aware of the problem of theft from moving trucks on the Keiskamma Cuttings."

"Several arrests and recovery of stolen goods have been made by SAPS. Police are conducting patrols at the cuttings."

"From time to time we still get reports of sporadic thefts from trucks when the thieves notice an opportunity. But most of the time they get arrested by SAPS Highway Patrol and Chalumna SAPS."

Tana urged communities to work with the police by reporting criminals and criminal activities.



SEEING DOUBLE: This year has seen a record number of twins at Little Beacons Educare centre in Beacon Bay. There are three sets of twins in one class and five sets altogether. Seated on the jungle gym, are from back to front, Dane and Ethan Pearson, Onwabile and Siphosethu Ncume, Riley and Jorja Fetting, Ethan and Hannah McNamara and Anga and Anam Jack
Picture: SUPPLIED



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