

How mining has destroyed our land

It is a sorry fact that the mining of gold, uranium, coal and other metals and elements has left a legacy of damage to South Africa and her communities. The funding put aside within government departments and by the mining companies themselves come nowhere near providing for remediation.

Now a public private partnership is urgently required to handle the disaster of Acid Mine Drainage (AMD) throughout Gauteng, North West, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Free State and Northern Cape Provinces. This highly toxic water is pouring out of the ground in the West Rand, Far West Rand and Far East Rand. As it gushes into our rivers and streams, it pollutes not only them, but the groundwater and the ground itself. This means a loss of precious land and water resources, making the areas vulnerable and decreasing food and water security in the areas affected.

The tour of the West Rand run by activist Mariette Liefferink takes place regularly and gives other activists, government officials and MPs an opportunity to see the problems first hand. It starts at the Lancaster Dam:



This is the source of the Wonderfonteinspruit, which provides Potchefstroom with water. The red tinge is iron pyrites. The whole area is radioactive and there is no fencing to prevent people walking across the land taking a short cut to Kagiso.

The lack of fencing around highly radioactive areas is a feature throughout the tour. It can be safely said that nowhere is fenced and no warning signs are visible anywhere.

Here electricity pylons display rust from the highly acidic atmosphere. Air pollution is another feature of the area. Even on a still day, the fine powder bearing cyanide and uranium blows from the tailings dams and is breathed in by everyone including small children. The latter are especially vulnerable to the effects of this, developing chest complaints.

These are the tailings dams behind the brickworks opposite Lancaster Dam. The brickworks use the radioactive tailings to make bricks and these have then been used to build RDP houses.



Finally, the rubbish dump proudly on top of a tailings

dam behind the Lancaster Dam, adding an additional load of pollution to the Wonderfonteinspruit. Kagiso shows on the far side of it.





Near to the Tudor Dam (one of the most radioactive areas) is a settlement on a dry dam, whose radioactivity is extremely high. Here people live on top of each other surrounded by tailings dams and exposed to radioactivity. There are no warning signs or fences.



Shacks on a tailings dam near the Tudor Dam – children live here.

Would you use these toilets? Well the shack dwellers won't as they have no doors and are not maintained by Mogale City.



Looking across the Tudor Dam – again no signage warning people of the extremely high levels of radioactivity. On this day we saw many people walking across the dam.



Seventeen families live in this derelict shop at the Tudor Dam. They are all destitute and have a number of small children. They are completely unaware of the danger to their health.



Mariette Liefferink explains the story of the Amberfield Retirement Village. This estate is built on dolomitic land already riddled with sink holes and it is surrounded by tailings dams. A boutique hotel, at least fifty cottages and a large number of flats were completed before the developer was stopped. There is also a clubhouse and an open air theatre. Standard Bank and Investec have funded the development. The appearance of sink holes caused the halting of the development, which should never have been approved.



Open tailings where people come to ride their quad bikes. Also on this road is a quadbiking centre where adults and children ride amidst the tailings dams, oblivious to the health dangers.

Below is a rider who thinks that he is safe as he rides his off-road bike.



Note all the houses around, built when the mines first opened and still inhabited. The complete lack of concern for people's well-being is the main thing that strikes you as you travel this area. Neither the mines nor the government is the least concerned about the possible outcomes of overexposure to radiation.

Mariette looks out across Robinson Dam, once a thriving water sports centre. This stretch of water now contains 40 000 times the allowable levels of uranium and nothing lives on or in it. The clubhouse stands abandoned.



This is the most radioactive slurry lake around the Randfontein area. The AMD water streams into it and is treated with lime. The area is unfenced, although there are paper no entry signs. Note the colour of the water – a strange blue grey!

Heavy metal pollution of the ground – iron pyrites is evident all around the area. Tailings spills are also everywhere. This is a very sick land indeed.



This is another view of the slurry lake red with heavy metal pollution, which lime does not remove. The PH of AMD untreated with lime is 2.2. Once treated, it is around 7.5 – too alkaline to drink as well as too poisoned with heavy metals.

Krugersdorp Game Reserve Decant



The decant of AMD from the Western void, as it goes under the main road opposite the Game Reserve at the start of the Tweelopiespruit. Note how well people are protected from falling into the highly acid water.



This is a really useful sign on the roadside.



The Hippo Pool in the game reserve. The hippos are somehow surviving. The buck and other animals are provided with alternative water sources.

