



Community crafters turn to alien wood to manufacture memory sticks

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Kharkams is a little Nama-qualand town on the N7 in the Northern Cape, somewhere between Garies and Kamieskroon.

It is situated in the world's only so-called 'arid biodiversity hotspot' – the succulent Karoo, where over 40% of the species are found nowhere else on earth, and 20% are found only in the Kamiesberg.

It is also home to Kharkams Technology Crafters (KTC).

In a unique project where technology meets conservation, KTC produces hand-made USB memory sticks from alien vegetation cleared to protect the biodiversity hotspot.

This is being done under the auspices of the Department of Water

Affairs and Forestry's Working for Water programme.

The idea to use the alien wood to produce memory sticks was hatched by Craft South Africa, and was developed in conjunction with ...XYZ Design director **Byron Qually**. (Craft South Africa aims to develop sustainable craft enterprises and income-generation opportunities for South African crafters.)

The project, made possible through a grant and support from Conservation International and the Development Bank of South- ern Africa, kicked off in 2007.

Qually says KTC uses selected branches from the wood harvested by the Working for Water programme, which are then delivered to the company's craft studio in Kharkams.

Here branches of the correct thickness are selected, and cut to size.

"Each piece of wood is treated as a unique object, and the individual character of each stick is preserved and brought out," explains Qually.

The printed circuit board assembly (PCBA) is imported in bulk from China.

The polyurethane potting mixture, which holds the PCBA in place, comes from AMT composites, in Cape Town.

KTC uses two to three truckloads of alien wood each year, producing about 500 memory sticks, depending on the number of orders the company receives.

Qually says the cost of a 1-Gb memory stick is about R250, depending on the level of customisation and the size of the order.

"They are aimed at a niche market which is environmentally aware and which would understand the benefit over the mass-produced, yet cheaper, plastic version."

The memory sticks can be bought directly – online – from KTC.