

## SA Mining

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# behind the words



Laura Cornish.

## Power to the people

**Last month took me on one of the most interesting and 'eye-opening' trips I have been on since my mining days began in early 2005.**

Thanks to my host, Thyssen Krupp Materials Handling (TKMH), I was privileged to see my first power station – and not in the far distance from the road or from an open-cast coal mine.

This was an 'up close and personal' trip – you know the kind?

Now I consider myself a 'well-rounded' mining journalist – I have seen many a processing plant and understand more than just the basics of the modus operandi of input through to output.

A process plant is a simple, yet complex stream – you crush, float, leach, and extract (obviously this is the over-simplified version).

But a power plant... the complexity is ENORMOUS – and the scale of a large power station dwarfs a process plant – even a big one.

The Majuba power station, which I visited, is situated between Volksrust and Amersfoort in Mpumalanga, and is the only power station that is not situated next to a colliery.

Just the turbines alone stand like elephants, towering above the average man.

The conveyor belts are massive, wide and are pumping coal at pace, the blackness and intensity of the performance beats like a constant heartbeat.

The control room, the information hub, the IT heart – awe-inspiring! To the unbeknown, walking into that room is

like stepping onto a space ship, with vast amounts of giant computer screens monitoring everything!

There is a person sitting behind every screen – every second of the day – and no one compromises on their responsibility to ensure that the process is streamlined, and working, delivering power to the unsuspecting person who doesn't give one single thought as to what it took to bring light to a room with the single flip of a switch.

Ash is the 'waste product' of burning coal for fuel – there is so much that it cannot be consumed. All the cement companies in the world could not devour the amount of ash produced.

TKMH supplied an ash-handling facility, including linked conveyor systems. The spreader is designed to handle 1200tph of ash.

In fact, every aspect can be described as 'unusually' large and process-intensive – and I didn't even have the time to see half of everything that is a power station, and still I remain utterly impressed!

The visit has left such an impression in my mind, and I will treasure the experience. Thanks to Eskom for agreeing to let me see the inner workings of producing power, and to TKMH for taking the time to give me an insight into a world I had yet to explore.

The experience was surreal and beyond my wildest expectations!

Eskom, and Majuba in particular, has earned my respect – yes, you are bringing 'power to the people'. ○