

HEMP

IN THIS BRIGHT
FUTURE WE CAN'T
FORGET THE PAST ...

Most people, upon hearing about the multitude of uses of the hemp plant, think that it's something that has recently been discovered and wonder why we aren't using it everywhere.

What many don't realise is that hemp and man have an extremely long symbiotic history. In fact hemp, known in other languages as asa, hanf, hamo, chanvre, bhong, canamo, kannab or cannabis, is thought to be one of the earliest plants cultivated for the production of textile fibres.

It was only during the last century that cannabis hemp was associated with its narcotic cousin marijuana, and therefore banned in many countries. For 8 000 years or more before that it was the world's largest agricultural crop, producing the majority of our fibre, paper, fabric, lighting oil and medicines, as well as food oil and protein for both humans and animals.

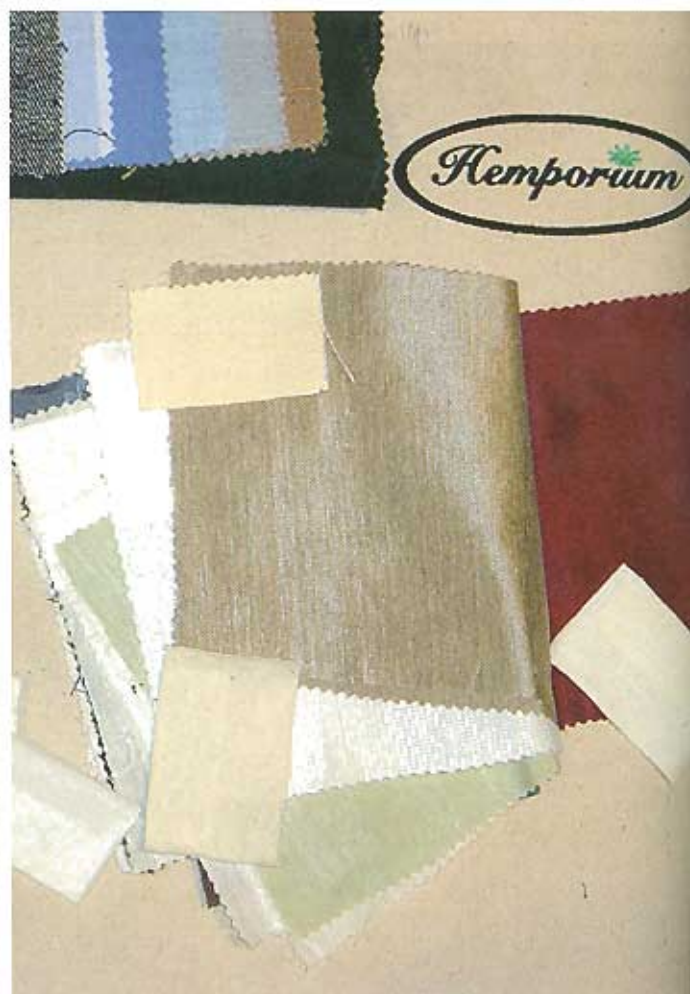
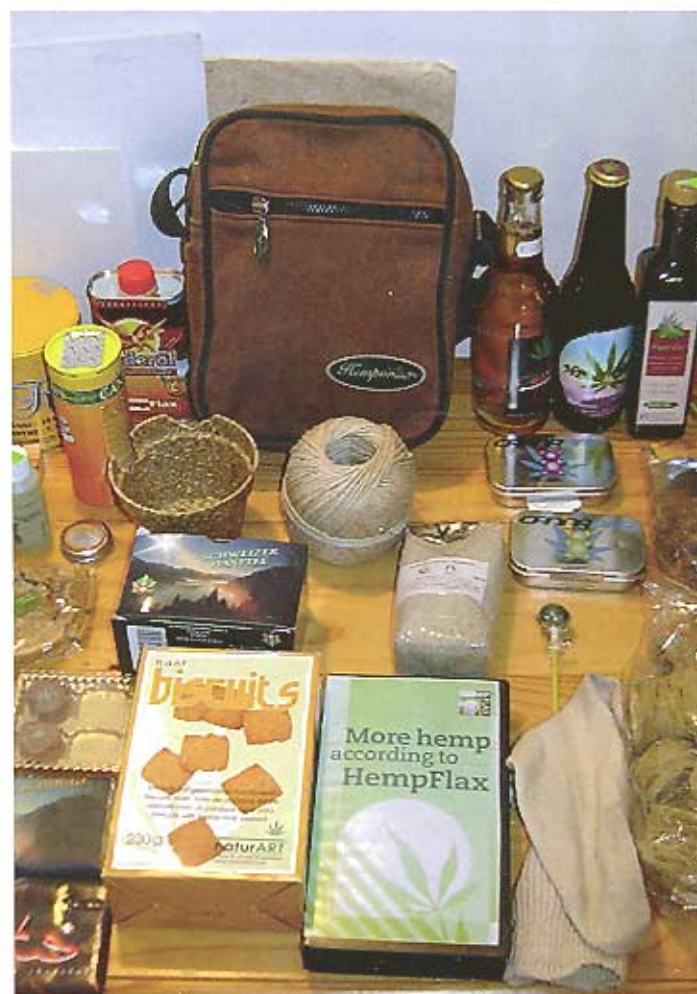
It appears from historical evidence that hemp originated in central Asia, between the Himalayas and Siberia, and then spread through the migration of man to all corners of the earth.

The incredible diversity and usefulness of the hemp plant accelerated its spread to almost every continent and culture. Because of its strength and durability as a fabric and cord, it was used almost exclusively in the sails and rigging of the ships that left Europe to explore the world.

Wherever the explorers landed, hemp was one of the first seeds they propagated, as it grew so quickly and could meet so many of their requirements for clothing, food and fuel. Hemp soon spread from Europe to North and South America in the 1500s, and at a later stage to Australia, where many people survived a famine in the 1800s by eating hemp seed as protein and hemp leaves as roughage.

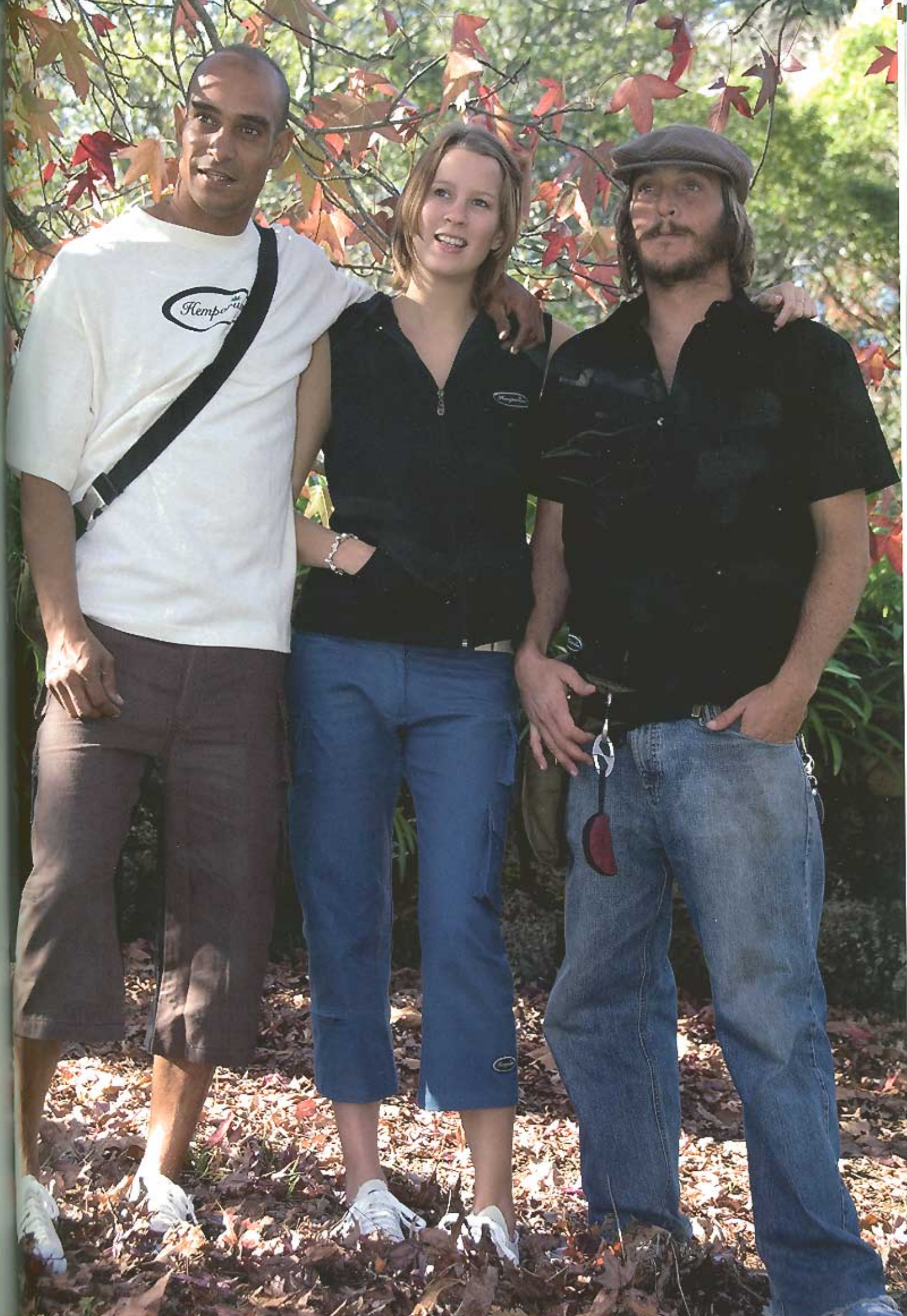
Hemp continued to flourish and meet many of the needs of the colonialists until the middle of the 19th century, when new tropical fibres were introduced, the petrochemical age began, steamships replaced sails and the toxic sulphur and chlorine processes to make paper from wood pulp were developed.

Hemp continued as an important agricultural crop until the 1930s, when new machinery was invented to break the hemp, process the fibre and convert the hurds into paper.



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This drew the attention of synthetic fibre producers (nylon had just been invented) and the paper and cotton industry magnates, who believed that they stood to lose billions of dollars if hemp's commercial potential was fully exploited.

They were largely responsible for the 'reefer madness' propaganda campaign that in 1937 resulted in the outlawing of this natural fibre, thus destroying their natural competition. They achieved this by demonising and outlawing the narcotic marijuana and thereby banishing the entire cannabis family, including hemp and its many thousands of legitimate uses.

Growing automobiles from the soil

It was around this time that Henry Ford invented a car (www.hemp-car.org/ford.shtml) that had a body made of hemp composites and ran on hemp fuel, in an attempt to fulfil his dream of 'growing automobiles from the soil'. But since hemp was banned at the time, and the petrochemical industry was making great advances, petrol was soon the prevailing fuel for motor vehicles, a move that has cost the planet dearly and will continue to do so until we move back to environmentally-responsible fuel sources.

A few years later, during the Second World War, the legislation was again changed when the Japanese cut off the supplies of Manila hemp needed for uniforms and ropes. The US Department of Agriculture then promoted hemp again, with a film 'Hemp for Victory' that urged farmers to grow the crop to meet the demands for fibre. After this brief return to favour, hemp was again banned in 1955, as it is in the USA to this day.

The USA's attitude towards hemp has influenced many other countries to adopt similar legislation. Part of the USA's criteria for foreign aid is the dismantling of the receiving country's drug industry. Since hemp and marijuana are seen as the same by the US government, a hemp industry would deny any country access to valuable foreign aid.

Despite this, many countries have recently recognised hemp's potential and its value as an environmentally responsible crop. More than 30 nations, including England, France, Germany, China and Canada now have a legal hemp industry, and many more are undertaking research in a move towards a change in legislation.

Although hemp has lost out on nearly a century of technological and market development, farmers and businesses are rediscovering its incredible potential across the planet. As hemp research and cultivation resumes, many more uses for it will be developed.

The search is on for alternatives to pesticide-greedy cotton, forest-destroying paper, war-generating and polluting petrochemicals, and nutritionally devoid western diets.

Although hemp is only part of the solution, many believe



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that it is the only known renewable natural resource that can meet nearly all our requirements to move back to a healthier, greener planet.

Here in South Africa there have been many research trials over the last 8 years. Although we have identified industrial hemp strains that grow well in our climate, we still face the major stumbling block that is the Department of Health's refusal to acknowledge the difference between low THC industrial hemp strains and high THC Marijuana/Daggo strains.

Things are progressing though, and the hemp cause is gathering support from within the government, including the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Environmental Affairs and Development.

With an industry that can offer so much with regards to job creation, housing, nutrition and fuel, we can only hope that this amazing plant is soon given the opportunity to prove its claim to be a part of the solution to saving the planet.

Tony Budden

For more information, and to show your support for the hemp cause, please visit www.hemporium.com or the Hemporium flagship store at 114 Constantia Main Road in Cape Town.

