

CAPE NATURE CONSERVATION



Keepers of the wild places

Scattered throughout the province, Cape Nature Conservation's numerous reserves are as diverse as the land they occupy. But while the Western Cape is one of Africa's most visited tourist regions, and many of these reserves will need no introduction, some might still take some placing.

The aim of this guide, therefore, is to familiarise the visitor with what Cape Nature Conservation has to offer and how best to enjoy it: from the maritime West Coast, to the majestic, high Cederberg; from the broad valley of the Breede River, to the near sacred fynbos covered mountains of the Overberg and Winelands; from the dry but equally holy fastness of the Central Karoo, to the oasis of the Garden Route.

The descriptions of the reserves have been arranged by region, prefaced by an introduction and the contact details of the main tourism office in the area. The regions are: Winelands and Route 62; West Coast; Cape Overberg; Central Karoo; and Garden Route and Klein Karoo.

In a world where even wildlife is packaged with five precious stars, it is

rare today to find that the outdoors, and nature reserves in particular, can still be enjoyed in an atmosphere of easy-going charm. There is nothing pretentious or exclusive here.

Cape Nature Conservation's reserves occupy unspoilt areas of little development and infrastructure, and will appeal to those who are independent, have a sense of adventure and like to get close to nature. For where would nature be without people?

Indeed, there is an emphasis here and that is on symbiosis and partnership: Cape Nature Conservation and people in the Western Cape. They compliment each other.

You can hike, bike, camp and canoe. You can bird watch, whale watch, snorkel and fish. You can climb up and down precipices or you can take up residence in a cabin.

And the nice thing about Cape Nature Conservation reserves is that when you do visit one of these areas, the number of people with ideas similar to yours will not overwhelm you.

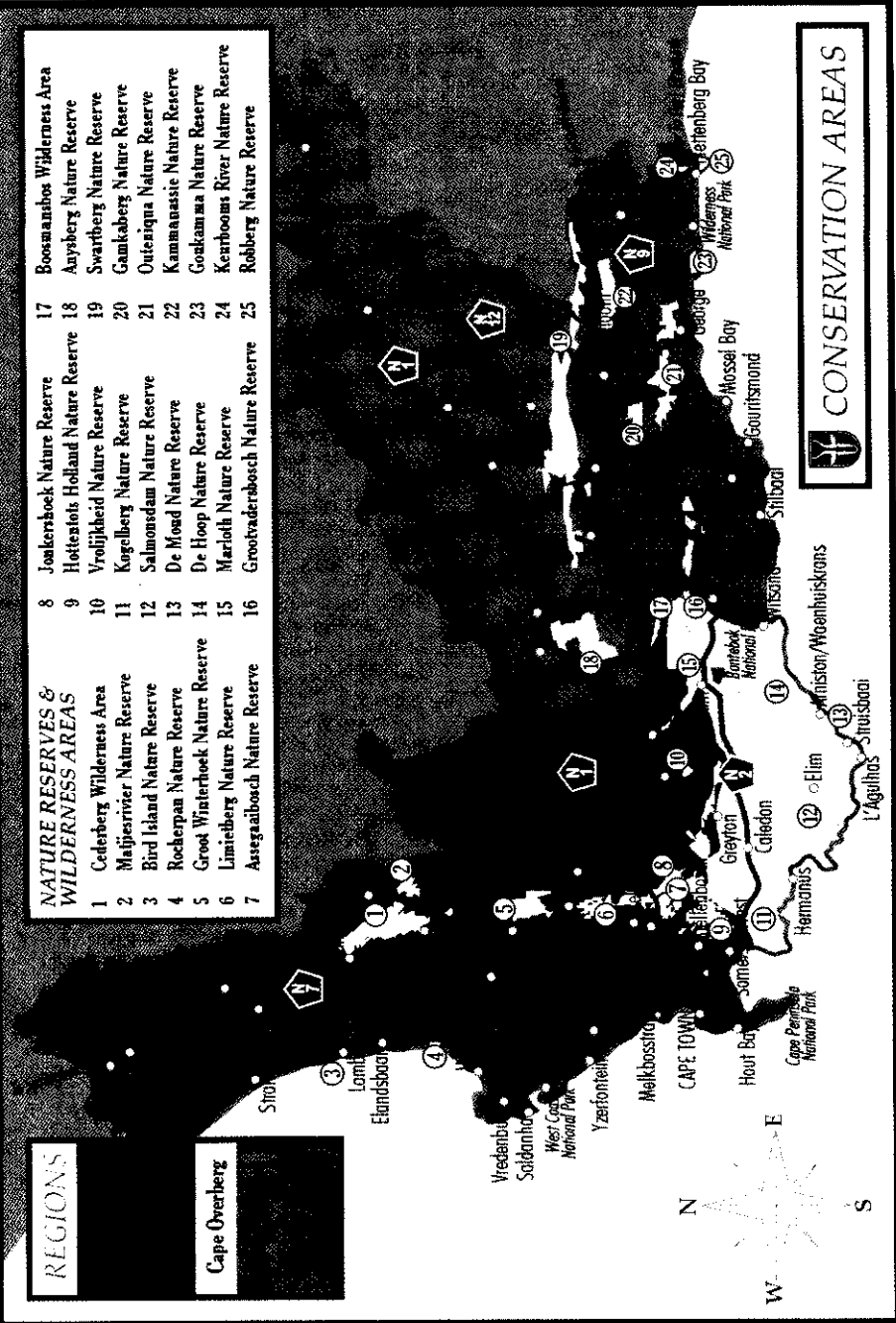
So, in this sense, there probably is wealth and privilege here, but it belongs to everyone – a spiritual utility.

REGIONS

Cape Overberg

1	Cederberg Wilderness Area	8	Joekraai Nature Reserve	17	Boosmansbos Wilderness Area
2	Matjesrivier Nature Reserve	9	Hottentots Holland Nature Reserve	18	Aansjers Nature Reserve
3	Bird Island Nature Reserve	10	Vrolijkheid Nature Reserve	19	Swartberg Nature Reserve
4	Rockpau Nature Reserve	11	Kogelberg Nature Reserve	20	Gamkberg Nature Reserve
5	Groot Winterhoek Nature Reserve	12	Salmonsdaam Nature Reserve	21	Outeiqua Nature Reserve
6	Limietberg Nature Reserve	13	De Moed Nature Reserve	22	Kamaansie Nature Reserve
7	Assegaibosch Nature Reserve	14	De Hoop Nature Reserve	23	Goukamma Nature Reserve
		15	Marloth Nature Reserve	24	Karbooms River Nature Reserve
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CONSERVATION AREAS



EXPLORE

Cape Nature Reserves

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Explore our reserves in

the **WINELANDS**

and

ROUTE 62



The grape is everything in the Boland, but mountains are its backcloth, frozen hard in summer's heat, melted soft in winter's snow. And yet what overwhelms here is the feeling of old Cape – this is the character of the Boland. For this is the Cape distilled, the Cape of recent history, three centuries old.

Here are quaint towns; whitewashed walls; thatch; gables; and good wood. Tradition and aesthetics mingle with the smoke from a labourer's cottage. An old man sits in a sunbeam on an old school chair. Children's voices carry on a scented breeze. This is the hinterland. This is the heart of the country.

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JONKERSHOEK & ASSEGAIBOSCH

Nature Reserves

A steep-sided valley of witchery crags, green gulleys and relic forests, run through by a cold stream, outside the old university town of Stellenbosch

Background

History records that in the late 1600s, under the doting and indulgent aegis of governor Simon van der Stel, one Jan Andriessen (aka Jan de Jonkheer, because of his illustrious past as a sailor) suddenly up and forsook the lofty mast and named this particular freehold land grant Vallei Jonkershoek. Time flew by. Vines were planted. Oaks. People came and went. Much was altered.

Today Jonkershoek, which includes the adjacent and smaller Assegaaibosch Nature Reserve, serves as a mountain catchment

area, whose crystal torrents provide water for Stellenbosch and its environs. Its turrets form part of the Boland mountains.

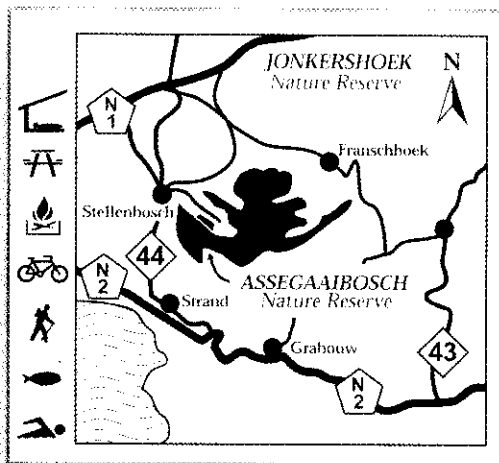
The old Assegaaibosch farmstead, built in 1790, is now a national monument and a rather swish self-catering guesthouse. Also within Assegaaibosch is what was once a colonial trout hatchery, ridiculous as it may seem, for trout are now recognised as an invasive alien species. The University of Stellenbosch uses facilities in the old, stone hatching-house (also a national monument) for research purposes. At the reception office you will find an interesting freshwater aquarium (open during office hours), and a wildflower garden nearby, which, though no longer cultivated, still hosts a variety of fynbos species.

Facilities

From the Jonkershoek entrance gate, a circular dirt road of about 10 km bumps and winds around the valley edges. Apart from a pleasant drive, this is a great way to get your bearings, before attempting anything more strenuous. It is along this route that you will notice signs marking recognised trails that run off into the heights. At the valley's narrowest point you will cross a concrete bridge over the Eerste River, before heading back to the gate.

But it is this river that is likely to leave an impression on you, particularly in summer. Pools of shade and bright water slacken its bouldered path under the trees. Flush-faced hikers and cyclists coming down from the hills know them well. Some people visit Jonkershoek for the river





alone, to relax or lunch lightly at their favourite spots.

But if it is a full-blown picnic spread you are after, then Assegaaibosch would better suit your needs. Here, along the same river, with its own canopy of trees, there are braai areas, picnic tables and toilets.

Hiking

You might feel a little mystified, initially, at what appears to be any number of potential walks and trails staring you in the face from the surrounding hillsides. But if you pick up a map at the entrance or at the reception office, along with your permit, you will see that the best and most enjoyable routes have already been marked.

Swartboskloof Trail (18 km): Via Kurktrekkernek to Witbrug. A steep 4,5 km ascent, level along top section and then a steep 2,6 km descent, down Kurktrekker to the Waterfall route.

Panorama (17 km): A steep 4 km ascent on to a contour path, over Dwarsberg plateau and down Kurktrekker.

Twede Waterval (6,4 km): An easy out and back walk, with the Eerste River in sight for most of the way. Up a steep section to the gorge. The dangerous ascent to the waterfall itself is closed to hikers.

Swartboskloof to Sosyskloof (6,9 km or a shorter route of 5,3 km): An easy circular route. Waterfall on stream in winter. Patches of relic forest.

Assegaaibosch has two short day walks (3 km and 5 km) that start from the picnic area. Both are suited to those who prefer gentle exercise.

Mountain biking

Easily the second most popular activity at Jonkershoek. But you need not be a pro, any clunker will do. Take the circular route. Make a day of it. Take the children. En route, dip into the Eerste River or into the icy streams that feed it. Take some cured hams, chocolate, feed yourself, why not?

Fiercer, leaner, more competitive riders will want to make immediate use of helmets, toe-clips and other paraphernalia. To do this you will need to take a run at one of any number of jeep tracks that head up into the plantations beneath the peaks known as the Twins, on the north side of the valley.

With perseverance you will emerge not only above the hoi polloi, but above the tree line and, once you have got your breath back, you will find yourself in silence so tremendous it will again take your breath away. This is nature's way of telling you to dismount, sip water and savour your muesli bar, and to steady yourself for the giddy descent.

Tips

* Jonkershoek and Assegaaibosch can quite easily be visited as a same-day trip from Cape Town.

* To get the best out of both reserves, overnight in Stellenbosch. Better still, set





yourself up in the historical and stately, self-catering Assegaaibosch homestead (pictured on page 6).

- * Wind and rain of a high order are not uncommon in winter. Conditions can deteriorate rapidly.
- * Take a swimming costume on hot days.
- * Best do the Jonkershoek circular drive in an anti-clockwise direction, as the sign suggests, or you will find yourself at variance with oncoming vehicles.
- * There are no toilets within Jonkershoek, but there are at the entrance gate and the tea garden without, and at Assegaaibosch.
- * If you take your car into the reserves, check on the closing times. These vary according to the season.
- * Cellphone reception is good except in the higher reaches of the mountains.

Getting there

Approach Stellenbosch from the R310. Turn left on to the R44 and then right into Merriman Avenue (note the Jonkershoek sign). Follow this road past three sets of traffic lights, a four-way stop and a traffic circle until you have passed the Lanzerac Hotel on your right.

Follow the winding road for approximately 6 km, to the gates and the guard house/ticket office. You can either park outside or drive in.

If you are now asking yourself what happened to Assegaaibosch, you should know that you have already passed its sign and the reserve office. Both are less than a kilometre back down the road. A perusal of the interpretation centre at the office will help to orientate you.

Fishing

Can there be a more relaxing and contemplative pastime? The Jonkershoek flyfishery, which specialises in rainbow trout, operates nine still-water dams at the conservation office complex. It caters for the novice as well as the experienced flyfisherman. Private tutoring can be arranged.

In the middle of Jonkershoek is the Kleinplaas Dam, fed by the Eerste River, and by a tunnel through the mountains from the Theewaterskloof Dam, near Villiersdorp. It will keep you amused for hours, either in your fold-out chair on the bank, in your waders in the shallows, or prowling, beady-eyed, the edges of the sometimes-reedy shore, with your caddis, your nymph, your dun and your dying. Finding evidence of the aforementioned tunnel might also amuse you. Cunning people, engineers.

An entry fee paid at the gate allows access to the dam. But you will need a recreational freshwater angling licence.



Enquiries and bookings

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HOTTENTOTS HOLLAND

Nature Reserve

The colonists' first great barrier to the interior remains a place unsuited to sensitive, retiring types – leaps of faith might be required of you

Background

While girding at the Cape, the Dutch eyed the decorative if dangerous interior with dreamy, faraway looks.

It was a horizon they came to call the "Mountains of Africa", as if, once conquered, all of Africa would simply prostrate before them. When it was found that Khoisan people were already living there, they changed the name to Hottentots Holland, as in Holland of the Hottentots, but they remained undaunted.

They fancied that beyond these often misted fault lines sat a certain "Emperor of Monomotapa", the possessor of a wonderful hoard of gold, and that any opportunity to meet him should not be passed up.

There were also tribes they had heard of, with huge herds of cattle to be bartered. And there was ivory everywhere.

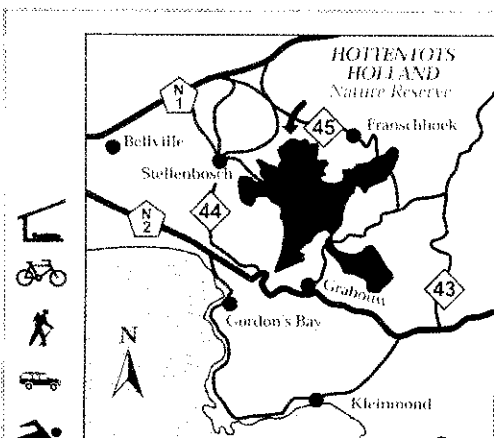
Expansion began, slowly at first, with freebooting expeditions-cum-escapades mounted by rough men and knowing blades. It was a two-day wagon trip just to get from the settlement on the foreshore to the mountains.

From then on, though, the veil was lifted and all went gradually but inexorably downhill. Soon it was clear there was no emperor, the last of the Khoisan had gone and the ivory was exhausted. Of that heady time, only the scenery remains, and a little of the precariousness.

Facilities

The reserve office at Nuweberg serves as base camp to hikers and kloofers, and to visitors generally. There is a car park, toilets and changing facilities, and a small interpretation centre that will help to orientate the first-time visitor. A short trail has been laid out nearby for the visually impaired. It is 6 km long and takes about two hours.

Further afield, four huts have been provided for overnight hikers – one built of stone way up on Landdroskop and one of a prefabricated nature low down at Boesmanskloof. They have bunks, mattresses and water, but are extremely basic – the idea being that one should come away with



Kloofing

This is not where you drive your car to a vantage point, get out and, from a bench, admire the views, with one of mum's sarmies in your left hand and your right raised to the bright hues. This is where, with a high, quivering scream, you suddenly up and launch yourself down rock-slide after towering rock-slide into successive pools of deep, dark, icy water, crowded in all around by rocks.

And when you cannot slide, you will leap, sometimes as much as 14 m, into free-fall and another pool below. And you will do this with only a wetsuit for protection. Some say it is an extreme sport, but on the Riviersonderend it is an activity more popular than hiking.

There are two trails to choose from: Riviersonderend Gorge (24 km; 7 hours), and Suicide Gorge (17 km; 5 hours).

Points worth remembering are that you will have to walk 5 km from Nuweberg to the start of Suicide Gorge and 3 km to the start of Riviersonderend Gorge. And another 3 km back to Nuweberg from the finish of both trails. And try to start before 9 am; you will be on the river all day before it flings you out.



a strong feeling of having been a shepherd. Be prepared to share these sites with other would-be shepherds, especially at weekends or during holidays.

Hiking

Between Cape Town and Hottentots Holland there still exists a connection similar to that created between the "castle" and

Monomotapa. You want to get there, climb, take in those folds, and see what is on the other side.

But conditions in the compass of these mountains can swing at any time and should be regarded as treacherous year round. The place is unknowable. Many a hike has been called off. Lives have been lost here. And though

conquest will always allure, turn back if you have to, or hurry to the trail's end, whichever is the closer. And do not stop to barter with anyone.

There are four overnight routes and three day hikes to choose from.

Overnight routes:

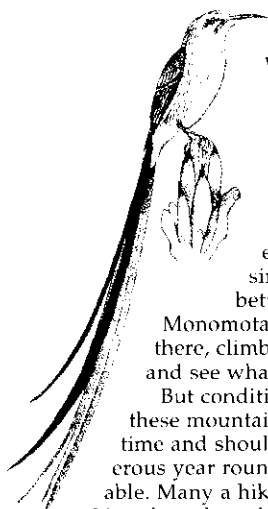
Nuweberg to Landdrooskop hut (12 km; 3-4 hours)
Nuweberg to Boesmansklouf hut (14 km; 2-3 hours or 18 km; 4 hours)
Boesmansklouf to Landdrooskop hut (17,5 km; 5-6 hours)
Nuweberg to Landdrooskop to Boesmansklouf (29 km; 13 hours)

Day hikes:

Boegoekloof (24 km; 8 hours)
Groenlandberg (22 km; 7 hours)

4x4 trail

If you still have the energy (and the vehicle) after kloofing or a hike, you can



finish off your experience with a 20 km-long 4x4 route and imagine yourself on the road to Monomotapa. The entrance is on the N2 on Sir Lowry's Pass. The trail (pictured below) heads off through mountain fynbos, rugged mountain scenery and pine plantations. It ends at Nuweberg.

Getting there

About an hour's drive from Cape Town. Take the N2 over Sir Lowry's Pass, turn left on to the R321, go through Grabouw and on towards Villiersdorp. Up in Viljoen's Pass, watch out for Nuweberg and the reserve entrance signposted on your left.

Tips

- * Both kloofing routes are closed in winter due to flooding and are only open from October to the end of April. Restricted to 60 people a day. The water is cold all year round. Wear a wetsuit.
- * Watch the weather for flash floods; the river can rise metres in minutes. Novices must be guided by an experienced kloofer.
- * All other hiking routes are restricted to 30 people a day due to the capacity of the overnight huts.
- * Permits are required for both kloofing and hiking.
- * The reserve opens at 6 am in summer and closes at 7 pm. Office hours are from 8 am to 4 pm on weekdays only. A manager is on duty seven days a week.
- * Cellphone reception is unreliable.

Enquiries and bookings

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LIMIETBERG

Nature Reserve



contradiction in modern terms – the old boundaries have all gone

Background

Now, of course, anything is possible, but in days long gone, there were limits, and this was one of them. The Limietberg, the northern border of the old Cape Colony: a few scattered farms; some madcap farmers; not a lot else.

Most people had already vanished, right over the top of this self-same Limietberg, in wagons, on horseback, but the majority walking. Never ones to be hemmed in, they wanted out. Which places a small question mark above the name.

Clearly it was only a limit to those who stayed, loyal to something: the others left, following another star.

Animal runs and tracks became paths that became passes that were eventually macadamised and then tarred, as the attraction for the beyond grew and grew. Through all of this, the mountain changed little. And today it still dominates, though people have now burrowed a hole right through it, and come and go daily.

The Limietberg is part of the Du Toitskloof, which, together with Jonkershoek, Helderberg and Kogelberg, is known as the Drakenstein and



Boland mountain ranges – a catchment of multifarious proportions. It is a lodestone, too, especially to hikers and climbers.

So consider this, when taking in your surroundings, and then amaze your friends: protected mountain catchments constitute only nine percent of the surface area of the Western Cape, yet they provide 60 percent of its water.

Facilities

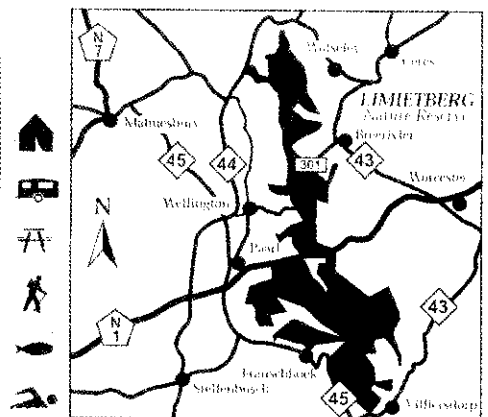
The Tweede Tol campsite-cum-caravan park of 25 mostly shady sites is in Bainskloof Pass. The park is on the site of the old camp at which the prisoners who built the pass were kept. But things are more comfortable here now. The ablation facilities, for instance, have hot showers.

Also part of the park is a day picnic site that can accommodate up to 120 people. Short, enjoyable hikes with stunning views are available to both the camper and day visitor, as are clear rock pools to cool off in on hot days. Peace and tranquillity, especially during the week or outside of school holidays, is a certainty.

Hiking

There are a number of hikes to choose from in the Limietberg, with names such as Kromrivier, Elandspad, Rockhopper, Bobbejaans, Happy Valley and Miaspoort, but probably one of the nicest is the Limietberg Trail itself, a two-day trek across the mountain.

Limietberg (31 km; two days): You will need two vehicles. The trail starts at the reserve offices at Hawequas, near Paarl,



where you can leave one vehicle, and ends at Tweede Tol, in Bainskloof, where you should leave the other. It takes about two hours to transfer vehicles.

The first day is 18 km of pleasant walking, mainly on jeep tracks, to the overnight hut at Happy Valley, where large rock pools delight not only limnologists.

Day two is 17 km (about eight hours). It is the more mountainous and therefore more rewarding section of the trail, although hot and dry in summer. So remember to take your water bottles and make sure they are full – stupendous views are generally more richly interpreted by a mind at peace with itself.

The route ascends to the west of Limietberg with views of Riebeeck Valley, Voëlvlei and Wellington, before descending Wolwekloof and down to Tweede Tol.

To get to Hawequas: take the Sonstraal/R101 turn-off (exit 62A) from the N1, before the Huguenot tunnel. Follow the road for 3 km until the signposted turn-off (Hawequa bospad/Limietberg Nature Reserve) to your right. Another 3 km will bring you to the reserve office.

Bainskloof Pass

In the early nineteenth century, with commerce and expediency in mind, Andrew Geddes Bain would have been your man.

More and more people were assuming the fertile valleys of the interior, building their futures, but Cape Town remained the centre of trade and Limietberg a problem because of this. How to get your produce back to market? Bain solved this with his



right brain and hundreds of convicts.

One can see the evidence in the ingenious, dry-stone walls, in the imaginative, almost romantic turns the pass takes, in what was already a natural defile, and in the steel rings imbedded at a number of

points in the rocks to which the prisoners were fastened. You will find some of their graves at the Neck, site of the main convict station and first Toll House.

Du Toitskloof Pass

Fearing persecution in France back in the late 1600s, the Huguenots pulled themselves up by their roots and came to the Cape. They established the towns of Paarl and Franschhoek. Here they eventually put down graves, little knowing that an incredible tunnel under what their descendants came to call the Du Toitskloof would one day be named in their honour. And yet the old pass, which winds over the mountain, still has a soul that no tunnel can claim.

The 10 m crucifix on top of the Drakenstein mountains was built in 1993 in memory of the Italian prisoners of war whose labour helped build the pass during World War II. Easily overlooked from below, you should have no difficulty returning to it time and again through a pair of binoculars, and even on foot, via the Miaspoort day trail.

Fishing

Fly-fishing enthusiasts should know that a number of cold, clear rivers coming out of the Limietberg are a home from home to trout. The Cape Piscatorial Society manages these rivers on behalf of Cape Nature Conservation. Bookings for the Witte River (Bainskloof), Elandspad, Molenaars, Smalblaar (Du Toitskloof) and the Holsloot (Stettynskloof) can be made through the society at (021) 424 7725. A freshwater angling licence is required.

Casual fishing is allowed at Tweede Tol, but a freshwater angling licence is required and is available at the reception office.

Rock climbing

The sport is controlled by the Mountain Club of South Africa and only club members or organised groups can climb in the Limietberg. The club may be contacted at (021) 465 3412.

Tips

- * As with hiking anywhere, choose an off-peak period to enjoy the wilderness.
- * Take no chances – take the 1:50 000 topographical maps, Franschhoek (3319CC) and Bainskloof (3319CA), and avoid a blunder.
- * When in the mountains, remember, snow, mist, wind and rain are common in



winter. Conditions deteriorate rapidly.

- * The Wellington museum has the full story on the building of Bainskloof Pass.
- * Reserve entry permits are available at the Wellington Tourism Bureau.

Getting there

The reserve stretches from Franschhoek Pass to Wolseley, and from Paarl to Rawsonville. Consult a road map or phone the reserve office for advice. Ordinarily you would drive to Paarl or Wellington, which is about half an hour from Cape Town, and then on to the section of the mountain of your choice, depending on whether you had decided on a day walk, an overnight hike, fishing, or a quiet circumnavigation of the mountain via its passes in the comfort of your own vehicle.

Enquiries and bookings

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VROLIJKHEID

Nature Reserve

Frivolity, boisterousness, emancipation – a joyous denomination. How better to magnify Mother Earth than in a name?

Background

Some time ago, much merriment was made in this part of the Little Karoo, and it was accompanied by great hilarity, judging by the name. Unfortunately, the origins are obscure as to what brought it all on, but it is nice to think that whatever it was provoked some surprise amongst those who witnessed it, even a little shock, like wit in fools and carthorses galloping, and that they were left the richer for it.

Because today, while things have long since settled down and many take their ease here almost for granted, there are others who continue to find humour in nature and who do not laugh alone.

This is Vrolijkheid's legacy; for nature is naturally of a buoyant disposition. She will simply bust out, though she is generally wholly contained. And this is also Vrolijkheid all over.

You might not have known, for instance, that the popular McGregor-Greyton hike (called the Boesmanskloof Trail) is part of Vrolijkheid. And next to Greyton, in deep shade, is Genadendal, the country's oldest mission, built by the Moravians in 1738.

Facilities

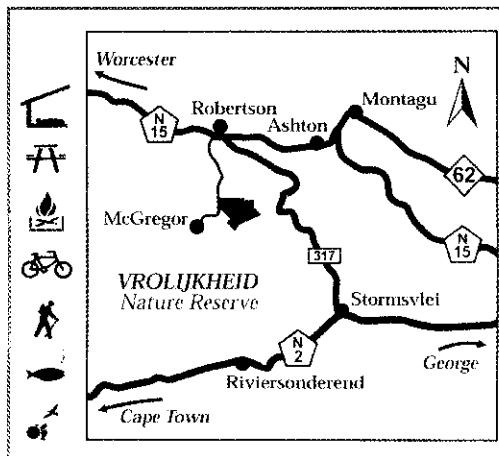
There is absolutely no shortage of accommodation at Vrolijkheid. First up is the self-catering guesthouse, located quite near the office complex. It sleeps six in four rooms. It has a generous kitchen and bathroom, a

small sitting room and a braai area. You will need to bring your food and other personal items, but that is all.

Next door is a small, well-equipped conference hall that can accommodate about 30 people. Further afield within the sprawling office compound, but fairly secluded, is a grouping of rondavels, four of which sleep six people each, while a fifth can sleep 12.

This is a no-frills experience, ideal for school groups, and bunk beds are the norm. Each rondavel has its own fridge, but the kitchen (with its hot plates) and the ablution facilities – also rondavels – are communal, as is the rustic lapa/braai area.

You will need to bring your own everything else, but with a little foresight and



fortune, you could get the place to yourself. Best book in advance though.

At the reserve's entrance, across the main road between Robertson and McGregor and a short distance from the entrance to the office/accommodation complex, is an interpretation centre worth visiting. It is housed in what was once a labourer's cottage and goes a long way to explain the area, its flora and fauna. There are toilets here too and a car park, from where the hiking and cycling trails begin and end.

The shaded picnic area has braai facilities and picnic tables for day visitors.

Stone wall

At some point you will notice and marvel at a low, dry-stone wall traversing part of the reserve. It is a ruin, a farm relic and it is extraordinary, not only in its length, but in its presence, for you will keep seeing it, ducking away into the distance, now here, now there, hundreds upon hundreds of stones. Its appeal is indescribable. Larks and chats love it.

Birding

A stroll along the Heron Trail (3 km) will bring you to two shimmering dams, each with a wonderful little bird hide. A few hours spent at either, of an early morning or evening, alone with your thoughts and

your Maker, should produce surprises. The hides, with their sympathetic structure, blend in well with the reedy surrounds. Get there before first light; stay until after last light, but take a cushion for your posterior and all will eventually sink in.

A total of 175 species have been recorded at Vrolijkheid, including the jackal buzzard, the African and pale chanting goshawks, and the black and African fish eagles.

Mountain biking

Vrolijkheid has a truly undemanding 8-km trail, where you will not have to embarrass anyone by pretending you are not what you seem.

Be yourself, tool along, take in the sights, it is not every day you will ride past a herd of springbok. The route is so undemanding you could turn it into an ideal outing for the whole family.

Fishing

A third dam on the reserve, a few hundred metres to the north of the interpretation centre, will please bass fishermen no end. And fishermen will please conservationists by not returning to the water any bass they catch. The fish are aliens. They were introduced in the 1930s from North America. It is now known that they do indigenous fish and other aquatic life no good at all.

The Rooikat Trail

Vrolijkheid is just the place for a ramble. It is well contained though big enough to get a sense of rocky Karoo expanse, with its succulents and stunted scrub, such as the guarri, the karee and the melkbos.

The circular 19-km Rooikat Trail, which winds up around the Elandsberg mountains, takes about eight hours. But set out early and you should make it back before nightfall, or soon thereafter, unless, in your rash inquisitiveness you are horribly blinded along the way by a carnivorous ground beetle.

This insect, which looks like a large ant and, in fact, preys on ants, is as common in the Western Cape as it is notorious for its ability to surprise. You will cross paths many times and notice its extremely determined manner. More studied observation will suggest a certain pointlessness to its path, almost as if it is hurrying guiltily from the scene of a crime.

Fascinated, you will think: Oh, I'll just pick that one up, shall I? Take a closer look. Hold it up in front of me for a while. It is at this point, through exposure to its acidic urine, that its sobriquet as the *oogpister* (or *koepister*) will immediately become clear to you and seem so apt. This acid is known by rural people to also cause blindness in cattle, cats and chickens, if not treated.





Boesmanskloof Trail

This route through the Riviersonderend mountains all but links the town of McGregor with that of Greyton, or vice versa. It consists of 14 km of strenuous stuff. Most hikers approach it as an out-and-back route. That is, they overnight in either of the towns' many B&Bs, where transport to and from the trail can be arranged. On the McGregor side, the trail starts/ends 14 km outside of town. A highlight is Oaks Falls, with its series of waterfalls and swimming pools. The stream here is believed to have never run dry.

Genadendal Trail

This is a rugged circular route of about 25 km. It takes two days. And though it is also managed from the Vrolijkheid office, it begins and ends at the old mission church in Genadendal, where facilities are available for those who choose to sleep the night before setting off into the mountains. The trail's overnight hut is on the farm Die Hoek, about 14 km and eight hours away on the other side of the Riviersonderend range. The return leg takes about seven hours. Regeneration is guaranteed.

Tips

- ✿ Water is available on the Boesmanskloof and Genadendal trails, but not the Rooikat.
- ✿ Extremely high temperatures can occur in summer.
- ✿ Self-issue permits are available for the Vrolijkheid trails. Bookings must be made and permits obtained for the Genadendal and Boesmanskloof routes.
- ✿ Cellphone reception is unreliable.

Getting there

Vrolijkheid proper lies about 15 km south of Robertson. It can also be approached from the N2 at Stormsvlei and the R317. This is probably the more interesting route, especially if you then take the meandering dirt road off this R317 to McGregor.

But if you do, ensure that once you reach McGregor's main road at the T-junction, you turn right for Vrolijkheid (not left into McGregor), which is a few kilometres down the road away from McGregor.

You should see the sign on your left.

Enquiries and bookings

Tel: (023) 625 1621

E-mail: vrolijkheid@cnc.org.za

Bookings: Tel: (028) 425 5020

Fax: (028) 425 5030

E-mail: dehoopinfo@sdm.dorea.co.za

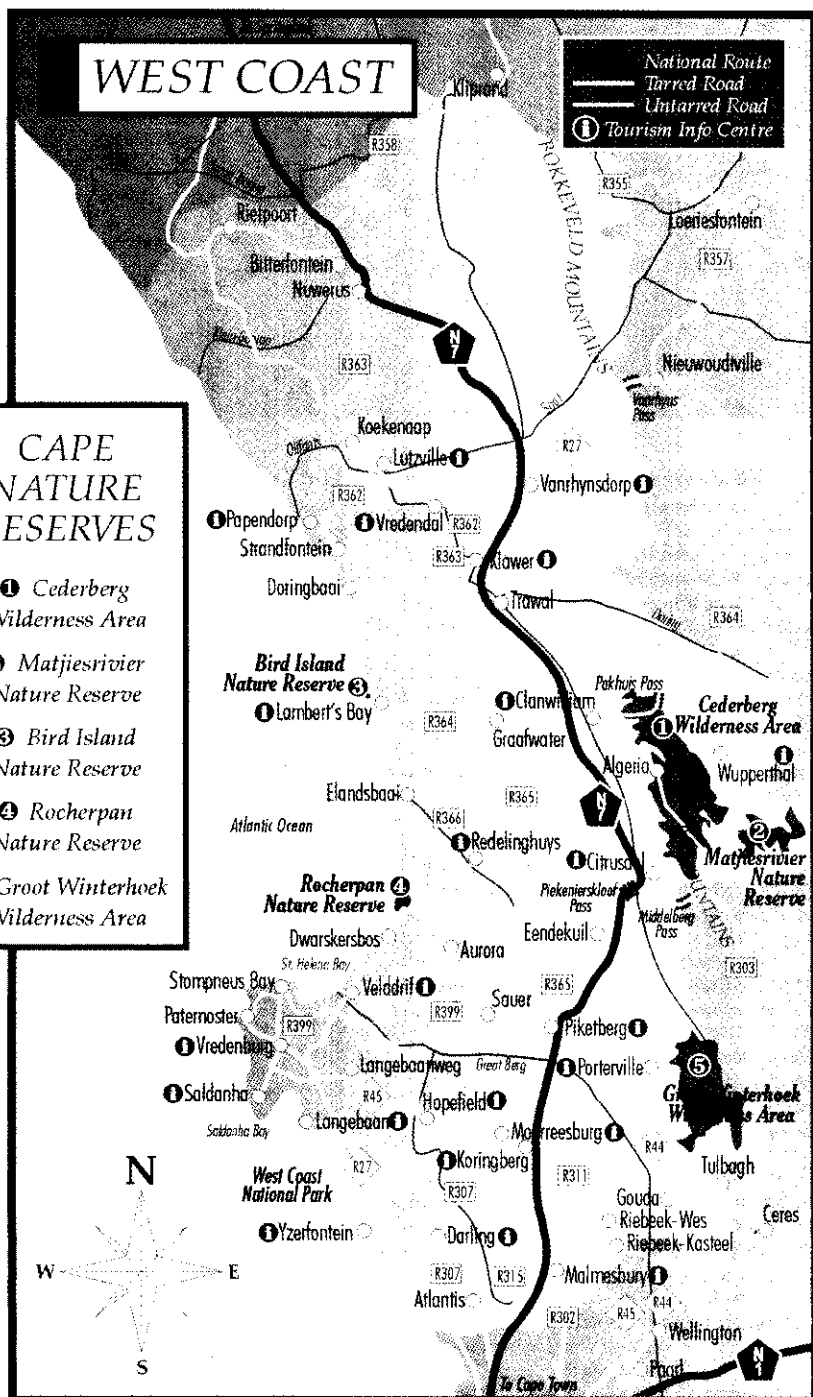


WEST COAST

National Route
Tarred Road
Untarred Road
① Tourism Info Centre

CAPE NATURE RESERVES

- ① Cederberg Wilderness Area
- ② Matjiesrivier Nature Reserve
- ③ Bird Island Nature Reserve
- ④ Rocherpan Nature Reserve
- ⑤ Groot Winterhoek Wilderness Area



Explore our reserves on the WEST COAST



To many, the West Coast is flowers, and an end to it, the fabled magic carpets that bloom wildly in spring and then close slowly their bright lashes and are gone. To others, the West Coast is mountains, and they will hear of nothing else, gothic mountains and moons and long walks with a stick. But to most, the West Coast is, well, the coast, and you would have to be a cold fish not to see it. And yet, as varied and grand as these legacies are, they are of small consequence alongside the footprint left in the sands of Langebaan 117 000 years ago. Many think of it as Eve's.

i West Coast

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CAPE NATURE CONSERVATION

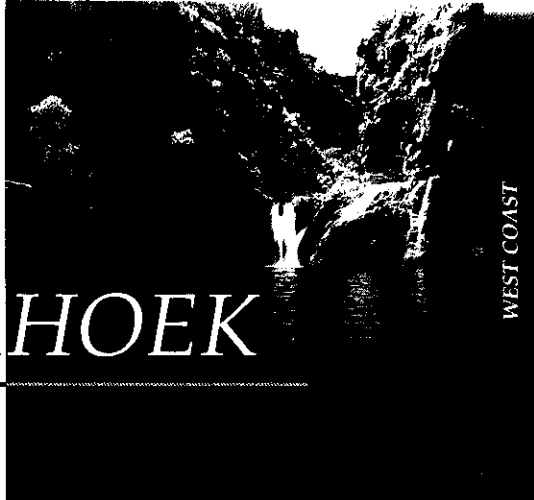
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refresh your soul

GROOT WINTERHOEK

Wilderness Area

WEST COAST



The source of great tales of travel

Background

Angular and august, the jagged range of the Groot Winterhoek draws itself up to 2 077 m, its stony face seared and scathed and blasted silver by the sun. In winter, deep drifts of snow stretch its bony length and stay for days.

At night, just once, we saw from our tent the moon in heaven's open vault throw the shadow of a leopard's head to a rock where, before a low rabble in fabulous formation, it deigned to make its next move.

At dawn the following day, we found, not the blood of some animal wounded to death, but that the white cotton thread of our footpath had found its way to a cloth of red disas rolled from a bolt out of the blue. All about as we went were waboom trees of exceptional size, their large, light-gold and creamy flowerheads fashioned like antique jewels.

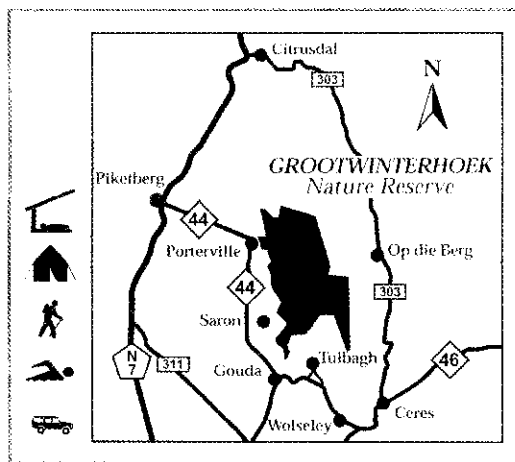
Later, we happened upon the numerous and celebrated transparent rock pools that have slaked people and animals for centuries. We allowed them to retard our progress – though one of these pools was fully 60 m across and easily the colour of pitch. It was in a pit in the rocks in a place called Die Hel and is said to be utterly bottomless. We were therefore loath to cross it, so did not.

And yet how we marvelled and sketched. How we chatted, too, through excitement, despite our fatigue. Then, our

courage up again, and our skins filled, we entered one of the caves above this well. There are three. We chose what we thought to be the most conspicuous.

Inside, a stream issued mysteriously from an aperture in the rock and bat guano choked the floor. The roof was 15 m high in places. A stratum in a wall had turned the colour of mustard. We went more than 100 m before the darkness, our sweat and fear of disease drove us out.

We were north of Tulbagh and east of Porterville. We were 120 km from the Cape and seemed to have been travelling for days, weeks. We were journeying to the Bokkeveld, but were now in no hurry ever to arrive.



Here were klipspringers, rhebok and grysbok. We saw a genet, a mongoose, a wildcat and a caracal, all within the space of two days and three nights. We saw the paintings of primitives in caves and overhangs. These things, we concurred, were special to this region. This was the wilderness we hoped for, this the freedom. It was time for communion. We felt to be on holy ground once more.

Facilities

In keeping with its atmospheric extremes, at Groot Winterhoek, you can either indulge yourself or test yourself.

A well-equipped self-catering house, Veepos, is situated up in the mountains near the entrance to the wilderness area with wide-angle views of the Winterberg.

This three-bedroomed house has two single beds in each room. It is meant either as a base from which to explore the reserve on day hikes, or as a mountain retreat and a place to relax. It has electricity, hot water, a bath and a shower.

The kitchen is equipped with a stove, a fridge and a microwave. Cutlery and crockery are supplied, as is linen. At the back of the house, in the shade of an old oak, is the braai area. Firewood is provided.

An old farmhouse at De Tronk has seven beds in four rooms. It has a flush toilet and a bath, but no shower. It has a gas stove and geyser, and a solar panel for lights. Cutlery, crockery and basic kitchenware is provided. A limited supply of wood is available. The farmhouse can be reached from the car park, either on foot (13 km; 3 hours) or with a 4x4.

The stone structures up at Perdevlei and the huts at De Tronk are nothing more than emergency shelters and cannot be booked.

Hiking

There are only three other reserves in the Western Cape that offer the wilderness experience: Cederberg; Boosmansbos (Grootvadersbosch); and Doring River (Outeniqua).

At Groot Winterhoek, as at the others,

Leopard

While there is always a chance of seeing leopards in the Cape mountains, your chances are greatest at Groot Winterhoek. Together with the Cederberg, Groot Winterhoek is a leopard conservation success story. Field rangers here find the spoor and droppings of these otherwise highly threatened cats two to three times a week.

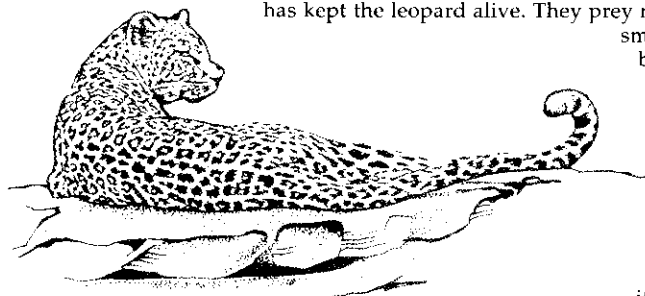
So successfully has the gap been closed between farming and conservation, that leopards are now occurring in areas far removed from their usual enforced retreats in the mountains. They have recently been found in the vicinity of the villages of Het Kruis, near Citrusdal, for instance, and around Leipoldtville, near Elands Bay. They have also been found in the dunes of the Verlorenvlei Nature Reserve, at Elands Bay.

Their survival is thanks in part to three things: being declared a protected species in 1974; the trapping of problem animals, rather than the random slaughter of any leopard encroaching on farming land; and the leopards' natural diet.

But it is their adaptable diet, more than anything else that has kept the leopard alive. They prey mainly on dassies,

small antelope and baboons, but have been known to eat reptiles, birds, fish and even fruit.

If you happen upon a leopard, do not overreact. As with all wild animals, they are seldom dangerous if left alone.





you can hike where you like, as long as you are well prepared and have a permit.

Paths criss-cross the mountain fynbos, but only the day trails are marked.

The idea of the overnight hike is that you choose your own route and follow it, exploring the rock formations and caves as you go.

Where trails are lost to plate rock, small cairns show the way, but a 1:50 000-survey map of the area will be a boon.

A popular if demanding two-day kloofing route runs from Die Hel to De Hoek. It has no path to speak of.

The route follows the river (the aptly named 24-Rivers system) with sections that pass through the river itself and along the edge of a ravine. It is an adventure. As this trail ends on private property, permission must be obtained from the landowner at De Hoek. You will need to leave a vehicle there, unless you are going to be picked up.

The nine recognised day hikes vary in difficulty and length, from 5 km to 16 km. They can take from one-and-a-half to four hours to complete (as individual sections, one way). Combinations will obviously stretch times and distances, as will the return legs.

Water is plentiful along most trails in winter, but should be carried on some sections in summer. Swimming in rock pools is possible year round. The pool at Die Hel is the largest in the Western Cape.

Look out for indigenous Cape kurper in the rivers and streams. They are listed as vulnerable in the Red Data Book for fish species, but are abundant in Winterhoek's waters. They are about 12-15 cm long.

Tips

- ✱ Rivers and streams throughout the reserve can flood at any time from mid-May to the end of August, when they can be difficult to cross.
- ✱ Temperatures can drop well below zero in winter.
- ✱ There are no toilets in the wilderness area, other than at De Tronk. The salient points of fynbos hygiene therefore are: carry a small spade or trowel; keep at least 50 m from water when relieving yourself; bury all excreta and toilet paper at least 15 cm deep; avoid defecating on paths, near camping spots or huts, in caves or at summit beacons; all other waste must leave the area with you. Please do not use soap or shampoo in the rivers or streams.
- ✱ Permits issued at the last minute can be collected at Cape Nature Conservation's Porterville office during office hours.
- ✱ Cellphone reception is non-existent in the wilderness area.

Getting there

About an hour-and-a-half up the N7 from Cape Town towards Piketberg. Opposite Piketberg, take the R44 towards Porterville, but instead of going into Porterville at the T-junction, turn left for Cardou on to what becomes a dirt road and head for the Dasklip Pass. Follow the signs to the office, which is on top of the mountain and about 33 km from Porterville.

Enquiries and bookings

Tel: (022) 931 2900

Fax: (022) 931 2913

E-mail: porterville@cnc.org.za

CEDER

Wilderness Area

&

MATJIESRIVIER

Nature Reserve



A huge and mountainous area that very nearly was not big enough to defend itself

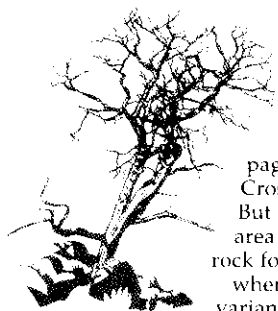
Background

To many today there is the outdoors and then there is the Cederberg. But as a place of recreation, the Cederberg was almost unknown prior to 1910. In that year, a start was made on Nieuwoudt's Pass, off the N7, over the Olifants River, and up into the hills beyond what was then the Algeria forestry station (named after the Atlas Mountains by the state forester of the time, a Frenchman). It was meant as an access to farmers and foresters, and not necessarily to the public. But after World War II, the notion of escaping to the mountains began to take hold, amongst mountaineers, and then amongst anyone with the means to get away.

Today, the 71 000-ha reserve is one of Cape Nature Conservation's most popular. The adjacent 12 000-ha Matjiesrivier reserve is managed as part of the greater

Cederberg conservation area, renowned for its fantastic sandstone formations: the Stadsaal Caves; the Wolfberg Arch (pictured on page 27); and the Maltese Cross (pictured above).

But basically the entire area is one stupendous rock formation, no matter where you look. The only variant is in scale.



As a place of habitation, the San roamed the Cederberg for thousands of years. There are some 180 caves and overhangs throughout the reserve where examples of their rock art still exist. They laid down the basis for the network of paths that now cross the reserve like lines on a palm.

By the late 1700s, the sheep of colonial farmers had boldly followed. It was at about this time that a disposition began to prevail: that Africa was so huge it could withstand anything. There was little foresight. But there was enough to radiate a contrary view.

This saved the Cederberg from desecration. For by the late 1700s, even its namesake, the now rare Clanwilliam cedar tree (*Widdringtonia cedarbergensis*) (pictured left) was being casually felled to right and left. In 1876 a forester was appointed to keep crown lands crown. A noble gesture, but seven years later, more than 7 000 cedar trees were taken down to use as telephone poles. Finally, in 1973, the Cederberg was proclaimed a wilderness area. And more recently, to try and further manage the environment, a plea went out. The result was that conservancies have now been formed on private lands bordering the reserve. One more call is expected: from the United Nations, on the declaration of the Cederberg as a biosphere reserve.

Facilities

Cederberg has two campsites, a number of self-catering cottages and, for the adventurous, survival camping in the wilderness. The two well-treed campsites are at Algeria

which to explore the day hikes and the area, or as an overnight stay prior to the six-day Swellendam Trail. It looks up on to the mountains, allowing you the opportunity to either prepare yourself mentally for the challenge ahead, or to lose yourself to reverie and extend your stay by a week.

The overnight huts (one pictured below) on the six-day trail, however, are a little more prosaic. To cater for hiking groups, the huts can accommodate up to 22 people at a time, and have what are politely referred to as field toilets. Hikers must bring their own food, gas stoves, cooking and eating utensils, and bedding. Drinking water is provided, as are mattresses. All this will seem heavenly, when you finally get to take off your hiking boots.

The Glenstream hut, which ostensibly is the first overnight hut of the hike and which has a flush toilet, is where hikers arriving at Marloth usually overnight before hitting the trail itself. It is not far from the car park.

Hiking

Being part of the huge and fissured Langeberg, the Swellendam mountain is primarily a hiker's mountain, although it is possible to footle around the lowest of the lower paths with a grass stem in your mouth for the best part of a day and still feel a sense of accomplishment.

But really and truly, one look at this skyline from the car park will tell you that it basically goes straight up and that cram-

The porcupine

Despite its footprint, which resembles a bear cub's, this is not a type of small bear, but a big rodent, southern Africa's largest. Being night owls, they are rarely seen, though their dropped quills are often found. These cannot be shot at aggressors. But they do detach easily and can cause huge discomfort when lodged in skin not their own. Porcupines can travel 10 km a night in search of roots, bulbs, tubers, bark and fallen fruit.



pons rather than a leaky flask of lime cordial would better serve you.

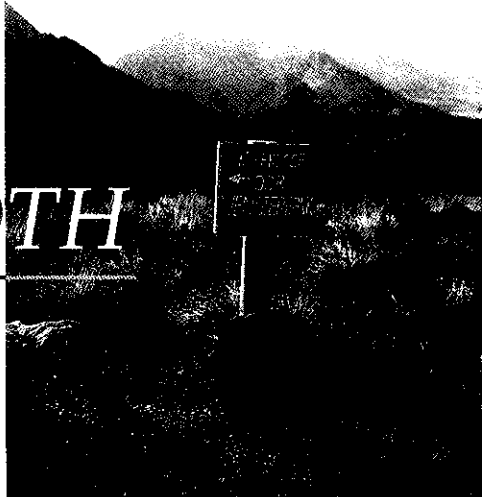
Nevertheless, each to their own, you will know what you are capable of. Bear in mind that a couple once spent an entire week within 5 km of the reserve office, utterly lost. They were rescued, but were poorly bunnies by then. Bear in mind too,



MARLOTH

Nature Reserve

CAPE OVERBERG



Up in the mountains behind Swellendam, entirely lost on the streets below, the crevice and the hiker are king

Background

In the 1700s, a party of trekboers – those early burghers-turned-pastoralists who strayed from the Cape and fanned out in to the hinterland – made Swellendam one of their camps, a place to pass the night on their flight into Egypt, so to speak. It grew into a town (the third-oldest in the country) even though 30 years after it was founded, it consisted of only four houses – pastoralists being pastoralists.

Nothing much happened for a long time, with regard to what we now know as the conservation ethic, although politically it was a colourful and vibrant period, short on memory and morals. In fact, for the most it was a case of the strongest survive, when plunder was the name of the game and business thrived.

Till, some 200 years later, along came a doctor, name of Marloth, with a heightened sense of posterity and urgency. He successfully petitioned the then Ministry of Lands and Forestry for the establishment of a small (190 ha) flower/nature reserve on the heights above town.

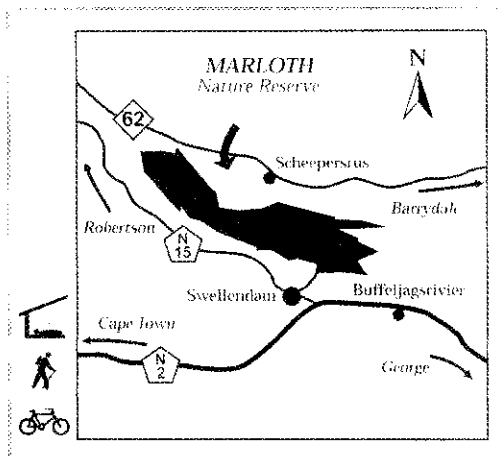
First settlement, then prosperity and then luxuries. This has always been humanity's way, of getting on, of making amends.

For although most of the indigenous forest had already fallen to the axe and the saw before Marloth made his stand, we benefit from his initiative in that today the reserve is more than 14 000 ha in extent,

with another 16 000 ha or so of privately owned land having been proclaimed mountain catchment. The densely forested slopes the Khoisan knew so well, and the trekboers after them, now only exist as relic patches in the reserve's damper kloofs and ravines – remnants that recall a wellness faintly felt.

Facilities

A person could grow accustomed to the reserve's comfortable guesthouse (pictured on page 43). It sleeps eight in three separate rooms. The place is fully equipped, this includes a microwave. All you need bring is your food and other comforts. The house is ideally suited as a weekend getaway, from



moderate to difficult, but if 58 km of switchback reserve and farmland track sounds excessive, there are softer options. Try a swing around the car park, followed by an orange. Then push for an out-and-about, with an overnight at a conservancy self-catering cottage (25 km), or two overnights at different cottages. Groups are limited to 12, with a maximum of 24 bikes on the trail at any one time.

Hiking

Two day hikes, the Bushbuck and the Grysbok, are between two and 15 km long. The former is confined to the forest, the latter explores the forest fringes and fynbos. But combinations are possible. Anything is. For instance, people talk of seeing leopard in the mountains, never for a minute expecting to. But at dawn one March, hikers coming along the path above the Duiwenhoks River on the Grysbok Trail did, or so they thought, so astounding was their brief encounter.

Riding

Horses were first drawn forth to log the forests, hence the facilities still in use at Grootvadersbosch – camps, paddocks, troughs and tack room. All you need is your horse and feed, and the forest is yours.

The redwoods

Between 1896 and 1913 exotic trees were introduced to Grootvadersbosch in an attempt at afforestation. One of these was the Californian redwood, a stand of which can still be found in the forest. When crooking your neck at these giants, rest your chin up against their bark and consider that the biggest redwood in America is 100 m tall, 8 m thick, and 2 600 years old.

Boosmansbos Wilderness Area

On the other side of Grootvadersbosch, where the forest opens to heather, lies the 14 000 ha wilderness (proclaimed in 1978).

Enter here and you will be amongst fynbos, mountains and forested ravines. There are 64 km of unmarked paths, and although at least three are recognised routes, the idea is that you choose your own. A stone hut at Helderfontein (pictured below) is the only man-made shelter in Boosmansbos.

The aim of a wilderness experience is to find no sign of humans, not even the lights of a farm. You are encouraged to keep off the beaten track. But to achieve this you need to be self-sufficient. Not even fires are permitted. In other words, you should have something of the hermit in you.

Tips

- * The nearest town is Heidelberg. The next is Swellendam. Specialist requirements, such as bicycle spares, cigars and mum's lemon curd, should be brought with.
- * Book at least a month in advance.
- * Weather patterns are worth noting when taking to Boosmansbos Wilderness Area.
- * Cellphone reception is non-existent.

Getting there

After Swellendam on the N2, take the R324 through Suurbraak, but instead of turning left up Tradouws Pass, drive on to where the tar turns to dirt and follow the signs to the reserve, no more than about 10 km on.

Enquiries and bookings

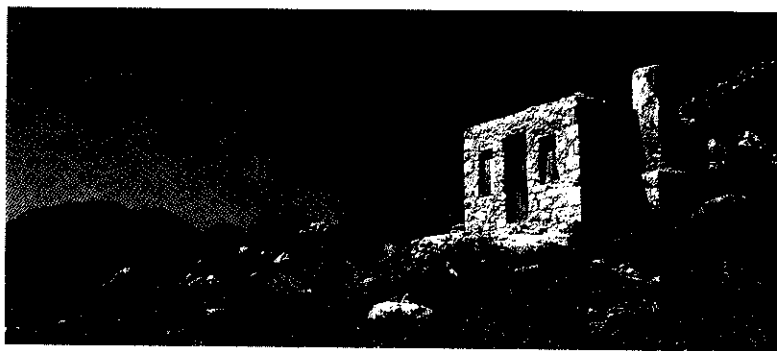
Tel: (028) 722 2412

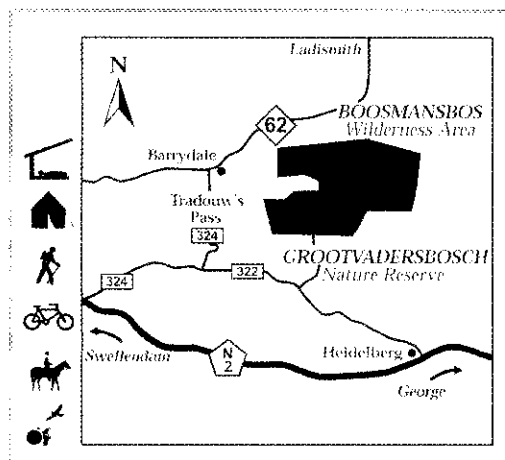
E-mail: gybosch@telkomsa.net

Bookings: Tel: (028) 425 5020

Fax: (028) 425 5030

E-mail: dehoopinfo@sdm.dorea.co.za





mention birds, frequent the forest edge to feed at dusk and dawn. You will be well positioned in either instance.

Camping

A small campsite with its own ablution block is situated not too far from the office complex and the interpretation centre. Each of the 10 sites available look out over a section of the forest. Here there is also a large, thatched communal lapa/braai area, with a fridge that hard-pressed campers can use. But you should bring your own grids.

Birding

The reserve's most popular activity. Woods such as these are hard to find in the Cape

this far south of the Knysna forests. Two hides have been built at separate spots, with the guile of a guerrilla ambush. Those birds will never see you and then it will be too late. But such is the intrigue involved here, that you could still overlook some birds – like F. le Vaillant's old flatterer, the Klaas's cuckoo, or the Narina trogon, whose Khoisan namesake in the late 1700s so captivated the young French naturalist with her blatant ventriloquisms.

Mountain biking

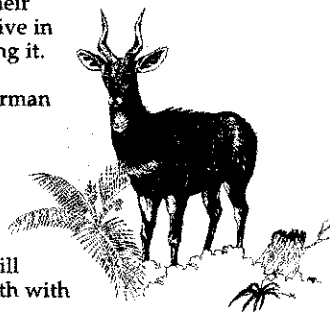
Thanks in large part to a conservancy that borders on the reserve, the Grootvadersbosch Conservancy Cycle Trail (58 km) is one of the best. The route is graded

The bushbuck

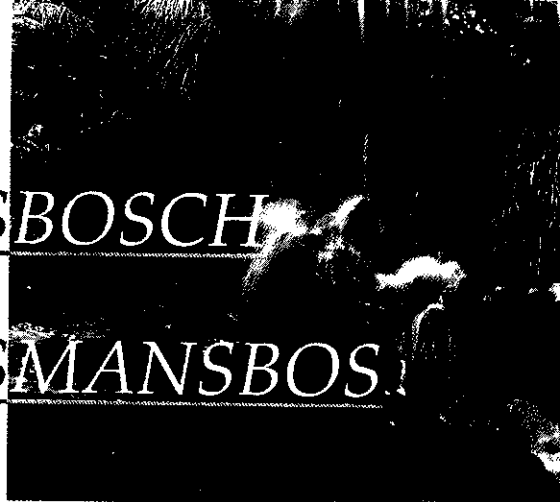
Common throughout southern Africa and found in the most unlikely thickets, these relatively large animals, with their white clerical collars, have a remarkable ability to survive in close proximity to people, often without people knowing it.

As a species, they were first noted and scientifically described in 1780 by the Swedish botanist Anders Sparrman from a specimen collected in the forests of Grootvadersbosch.

They are said to still be abundant in these forests. In fact, being more or less nocturnal, they are seldom seen, except at dawn and at dusk, when they leave their deep-cover lie-ups to feed. Their natural enemies are leopard. They can clear fences almost at will and will utter a loud cough and crash away into the undergrowth with prodigious leaps when alarmed.



GROOT VADERSBOSCH & BOOSMANSBOS Wilderness Area



Dark stars in the hills above Heidelberg, missing masses that do not readily emit light. And yet those who have travelled here tell of another world, of lasting impressions drawn from life

Background

Grootvadersbosch is one of the province's lesser-known reserves, which, for those who know it and keep returning to it, is how it should be.

This forested area, at 250 ha the most remarkable in the southern Cape, was once far more wooded than it now is. It started modern life as a farm called Melkhoutskraal, the owner of which was known as the Groot Vader, but whether he took his name from the venerable trees or whether he was a grandfather is not known.

What is known is that it was 1723 and a patriarchal time, so much so that subsequent owners happily took the same name. But dissent was all about.

The adjoining area, which in the early 1900s became known as Boosmansbos, was named after a man who apparently took no name, but who also took to the woods, deeper than anyone, withdrawing completely at times, not only from society, but from the incumbent Groot Vader. The man has been described as a hermit, though not overtly religious. He might even have been a type of activist, a true father of the forest, what some today might refer to as a tree-hugger. If so, with good reason, for men with axes were as thick as thieves about then, hacking at the forest as if there was no tomorrow.

In 1898 they had the temerity to establish a forest station on a nearby ascending node, calling it, innocently enough, Strawberry Hill. Until, inevitably, on to these by now deforested lands came other men who loved the linear and who laid down plantations – rows and rows of exotic pine trees, until all you could see were pines.

Then, in 1986, Cape Nature Conservation assumed control of the area, and two years later, began clearing the pines, so that today, where there is no indigenous forest, there is at least fynbos.

And that, as they say, is the treeness of the tree, the essential story of Grootvadersbosch, for we no longer speak off-handedly of forests, as if they were commonplace and belonged to everyone, but of indigenous forests that have somehow survived and that we now proudly care for, as a grandmother might her grandchild.

Facilities

Out on the edges of either end of the forest are two wooden, self-catering chalets – one named *Podocarpus*, after the Outeniqua yellowwood, the other *Scolopia*, after the red pear tree found in the forest. *Podocarpus* sleeps seven in three rooms. It has a fully equipped kitchen (with microwave), a bathroom (no shower) and a sitting room. It also has a wonderfully secluded braai area alongside the cottage.

Scolopia sleeps six, has two rooms and is similarly equipped, except that it has an elevated deck overlooking the forest, instead of a lapa.

Bushbuck and other small game, not to



river is likely to be at its fullest, and when only competent canoeists (Grade III) should tackle it. Enquire at the office about guided tubing and rafting on the river.

Warhorses

Well not quite, but descendants of, surely? Mythology surrounds the wild horse herd found on the marshes of Rooisand, at the Bot River estuary. Some say the British abandoned their forebears during the Anglo-Boer South African War. Others say they once formed part of a Boer commando. Still others link them somehow to the Great War. Perhaps all are notions, as romantic as those attached to Pegasus.

Tips

- * Permits are required for all activities within the reserve.
- * Swim only at marked areas.
- * The reserve opens at 7.30 am and closes at 7 pm in summer. In winter the reserve hours are 8 am to 6 pm).
- * You will find parking and toilets at the Oudebosch office.
- * Trail distances and times allow for swimming and resting.
- * Cellphone reception is sporadic and cannot be relied on.



Getting there

The reserve is just over an hour's drive up the east coast from Cape Town. Take the N2 towards Sir Lowry's Pass. Turn right on to the R44 through Gordon's Bay. Continue on this scenic coastal route, past Rooiels, Pringle Bay and Betty's Bay. Just before you cross the bridge over the Palmiet River estuary and about 3 km from Kleinmond, take the sign-posted dirt road to the left. The office at Oudebosch is 3 km on.

Enquiries and bookings

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