

Mountain biking

If recreation for you is a deckchair and anything else undignified, then mountain biking will suggest anathema. But if a bike on a high track heading out epitomises the free-wheeling life, then Kogelberg is the place to live it.

The reserve offers cyclists two routes: the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve Mountain Bike Trail and Palmiet River Valley Mountain Bike Trail. The Kogelberg route is 39 km long and takes five hours of hard riding. It starts at the Mispah Youth Camp, next to the Kogelberg Dam (accessed from the N2 near the Grabouw turnoff) and finishes at Oudebosch. There is little shade, but plenty of water, enough even to swim in. Booking is essential, through Maverick Cycles (021) 851-4192. The 26 km Palmiet trail, booked through the Oudebosch office (028) 271 5138, takes about five hours and is graded moderate. It starts at Oudebosch, winds up into the Palmiet River valley and ends at the Stokoe bridge. Here you can swim and picnic before your return to Oudebosch by the same route. Neither route is suitable for children younger than 10 years.

inspirational and one of more than 400 biosphere reserves worldwide. Kogelberg was South Africa's first registered biosphere reserve and it encompasses the entire coastal area from Gordon's Bay to the Bot River vlei, and inland to Grabouw and the Groenland Mountain.

Facilities

Very basic, no-frills accommodation is available in three old timber cabins situated in the reserve's Palmiet River valley, right in the fynbos. Each cabin sleeps six people and consists of three bedrooms with two single beds per room.

There are baths but no showers. Hot water is available. The kitchens are only equipped with a fridge, a small two-plate stove and a kettle. You will need to bring everything else you think you will need for a comfortable stay.

Hiking

More than anything and, some would say, anywhere else, Kogelberg is a range for the hiker. In biosphere reserve terms, this is what is described as low-impact recreation. There are a number of trails to choose from, but four of the best start from the office at Oudebosch.

Kogelberg Trail (23 km; 8-9 hours): This circular route takes you right through the heart of the reserve. The trail is graded moderate to long. Start before 10 am. Groups are limited to 12 people.

Palmiet River Walk (9-18 km; 3-7 hours): This trail hugs the river, then takes you deep into the reserve to the Stokoe bridge and back again. It has been graded easy.



Groups are limited to 10 people and you should ensure that you begin before noon.

Oudebosch to Leopard's Gorge (6 km; 3-4 hours): This is a one-way-only route. You will need a vehicle to get you to Oudebosch and another to collect you at the end, at the Harold Porter Botanical Garden. The grade is moderate. Begin before noon. Harold Porter closes at 6 pm.

Canoe trail

This ever popular trail covers 15 km of the Palmiet River and, with rests and section repeats, is an all-day affair. It is open only in winter (June 1 – September 30), when the

KOGELBERG

Nature Reserve



This plaid green highland holds the richest fynbos in the Cape Floral Kingdom

Background

Kogelberg is Cape Nature Conservation's prettiest reserve; thanks largely to the fact that it occupies an area that has been least interfered with by people in the past. Today it is considered the heart of the Cape Floral Kingdom because of the exceptional quality of its fynbos.

Perhaps you have driven past it along that magical coastal road from Gordon's Bay, past Rooiels to Kleinmond. If you have, you would have marvelled at its beauty at whatever time of the year: in the blazing suns of summer, when green is not what you expect; or in the rains and mists of winter, when torrents of water cascade down rock faces that were bone dry only weeks before. You would also have marvelled at how such a place could still exist, experience having taught you to associate buildings and houses and infrastructure with places of natural beauty. Not so at Kogelberg. Here the word is pristine.

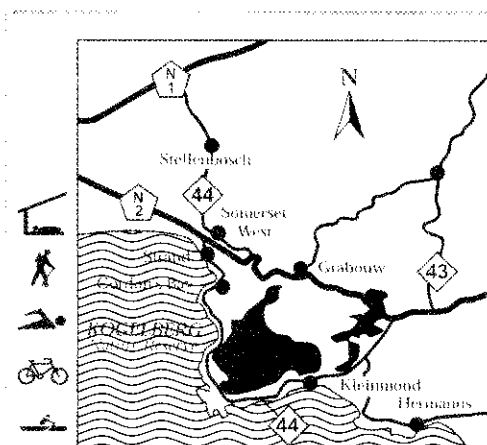
The reserve presents perhaps the finest example of mountain fynbos in the Western Cape. It has 1 654 plant species, of which 77 are endemic. It also has three patches of relic indigenous forest similar to the celebrated Knysna forests. An endemic freshwater crab and the endangered micro-frog are also found in the area.

But source of the greatest pride to Cape Nature Conservation is UNESCO's recognition of Kogelberg as a biosphere reserve.

Broadly speaking, this is an acknowledgement that people can live in harmony with nature, especially communities living in proximity to reserves or protected areas.

At Kogelberg, a sensitive core of 18 000 ha of the reserve has been kept pristine and wild. Here there is much biological diversity and conservation is the priority. Only activities such as hiking, biking and bird watching, that do not adversely affect natural processes and wildlife are allowed. The core is buffered by a more resilient, less ecologically sensitive area.

Beyond the reserve's borders, agriculture, plantations and towns form a transitional zone, and the sustainable use of wildflowers and fish are promoted. The whole is



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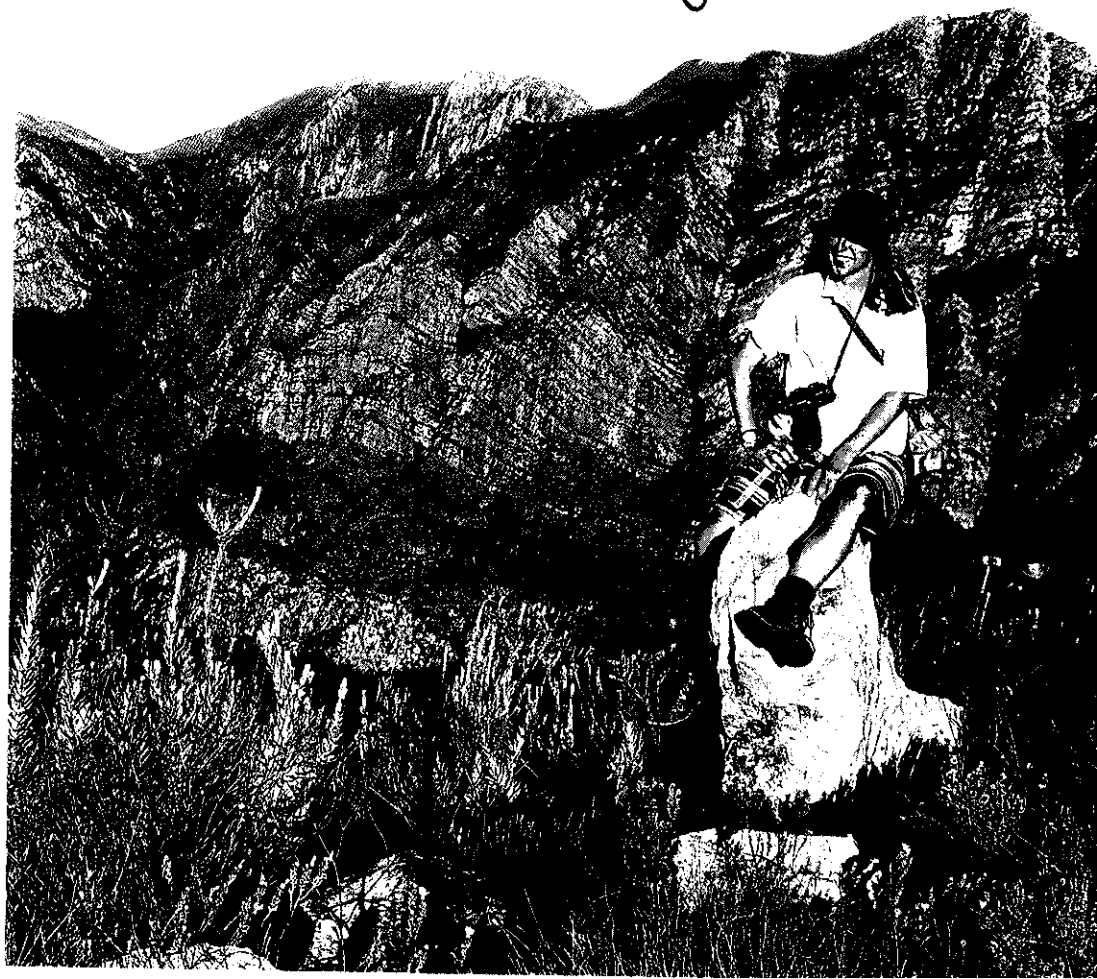
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CAPE NATURE CONSERVATION

www.capenature.org.za

refresh your soul



Explore our reserves in the Cape **OVERBERG**



Overberg simply means "over the mountain", that is, eastwards, away from Cape Town, beyond the ranges of the Hottentots Holland. And while wheat fields growing golden in the sun might appear to dominate here, this is something of an optical illusion, for the Overberg is really a floral kingdom of some diversity. Here you will find areas of fynbos richer than anywhere else in the Cape. So indulge your senses and then head for the sea. Here, after an absence of many years (when they were hunted almost to extinction), are the southern right whales. They come puffing into the bays of the Overberg like clockwork every year from June to November, and draw crowds of visitors.

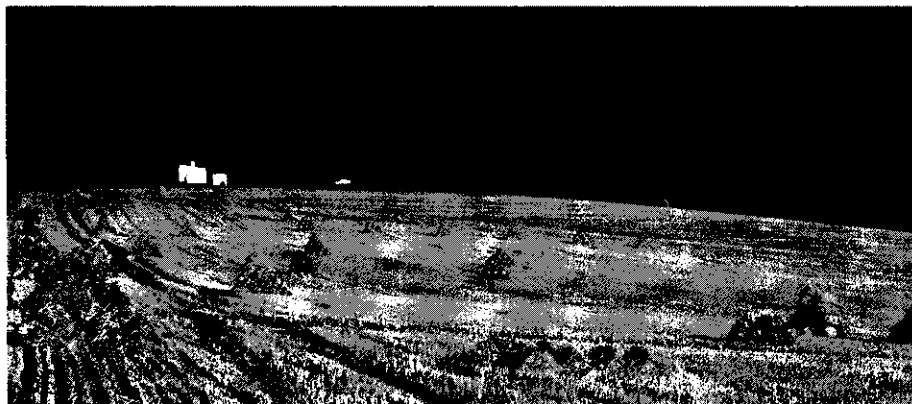
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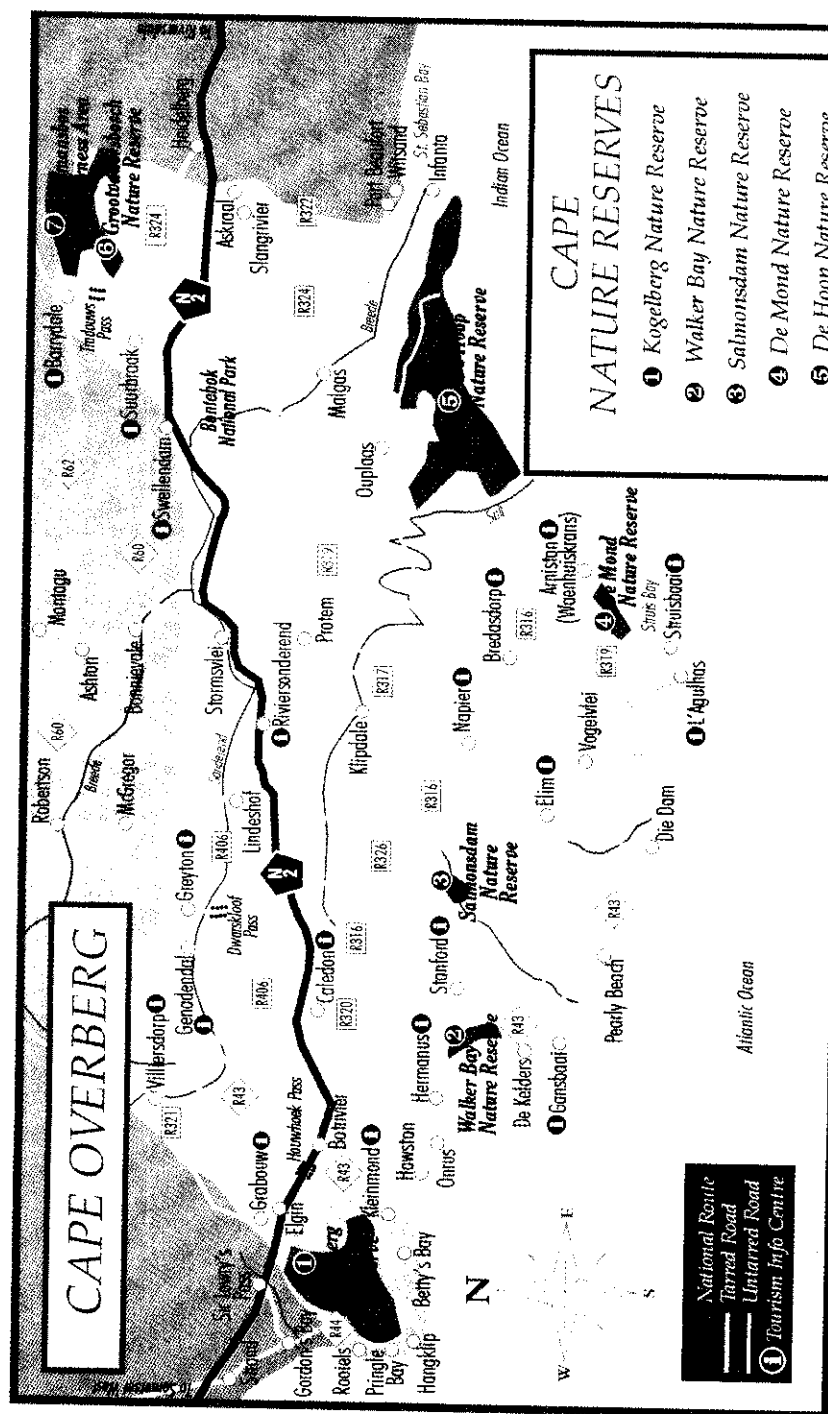
22 Plein Street, Caledon 7230

Tel: (028) 214 1466

Fax: (028) 212 1380

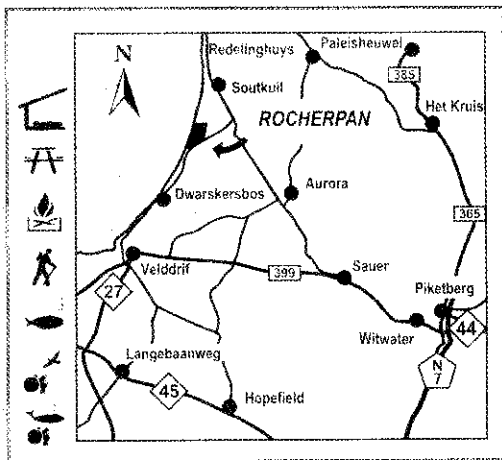
E-mail: info@capeoverberg.org





CAPE NATURE RESERVES

- ① Kogelberg Nature Reserve
- ② Walker Bay Nature Reserve
- ③ Salmonsdam Nature Reserve
- ④ De Mond Nature Reserve
- ⑤ De Hoop Nature Reserve
- ⑥ Grootvadersbosch Nature Reserve
- ⑦ Boomsmansbos Wilderness Area



top of a dune in the northern section of the reserve. It has spectacular views up and down the coast and inland. The bungalow sleeps six people. The kitchen has a gas fridge and stove, pots, pans and utensils. A braai place is situated off to the seaward side of the bungalow. There is no electricity, but solar lights are provided, as are mattresses. Bring your own bedding.

Rocherpan does not have its own supply of drinking water, this is trucked in weekly from the nearby town of Dwarskersbos and pumped into tanks. This water can be used for washing, but there is no shower or bath.

Birding

Rocherpan and birding are synonymous. The combination of land, vlei and marine environments provides habitats for a variety of birds. Pelicans and flamingos are often seen at the pan and are listed in the Red Data book for birds. The pan is also one of the Cape shoveller's important breeding and moulting sites. A checklist of the 183 species recorded at Rocherpan is available at the interpretation centre.

The marine protected area

The beach here goes on forever. You can simply walk and walk and walk. The reserve was declared in 1988 and stretches 500 m seawards of the high water mark for the length of the nature reserve. Rare and endangered black oystercatchers flying sorties against raiders from the clan of the kelp gull is just one of the avian observations to be made along this coast. From about June to September, southern right whales can be

seen from anywhere along the beach, although the dunes afford better views.

Tips

- * Binoculars for the eyes, plus a cushion for the bum, equals bird hide happiness for the soul. Whales, too, will look bigger.
- * Firewood is available.
- * Cellphone reception is unreliable.

Getting there

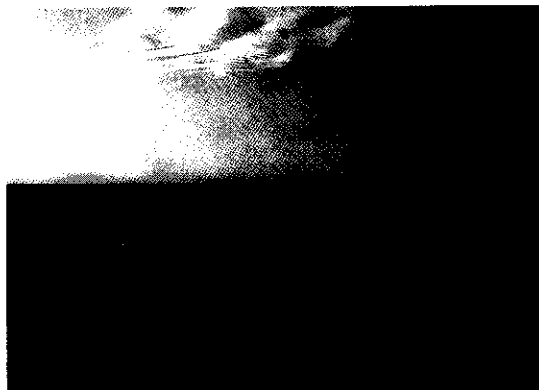
Rocherpan lies 25 km north of Velddrif on the coastal road. Velddrif can be reached on the R399, which turns off the N7 just before Piketberg.

Enquiries and bookings

Tel: (022) 931 2900

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ROCHERPAN

Nature Reserve & Marine Protected Area



W

here nature for once appears to have benefited from the interference of people

Background

Sapphire light shimmies back and forth across the watery wetland of this bog of a fen, this marsh of a pan, this swamp of a vlei, that, between March and June, is usually quite dry. Today though, the green reed banks appear to have drifted out over the midnight blue, like Earth's continents over its oceans seen from space. A crane freezes, and then shows itself, but only tentatively, to escape pursuit. Coots flap about in long, splashing rushes, frightening themselves and each other with their antics. Stilts circle and wheel with stiff-legged alarm calls, totally uncalled for. A cormorant clutches awkwardly at a branch, its beak draped with algae, unsure whether to stay or go.

From the hide, as the light goes down, more and more birds can be seen to creep from refuge. Even a little grebe pokes its head out, alert to every sight and slight sound. It gets darker and darker, faster and faster, until the eccentricity of the previous few hours begins to fade and one grows weary of believing one can will one's eyes to admit more light.

How queer that such a place should have had such a fortuitous if fanciful beginning. A farmer named Pierre Rocher arrived in this area in 1839. To improve summer grazing for his livestock, Rocher and his workers closed off the mouth of the Papkuils River, forcing it to flow behind the dunes that separate the sandveld from the sea.

Thus, inadvertently, a perfect habitat for water birds of all descriptions was created. The Papkuils (bulrush) River rises 25 km away in the Piketberg. When full, the pan is less than 2 m deep, covers 110 ha and is just over 6 km long.

But while clearly a thinker, squire Rocher was not smitten by ornithology. Instead, duck hunts were organised annually on New Year's Day, by invitation only.

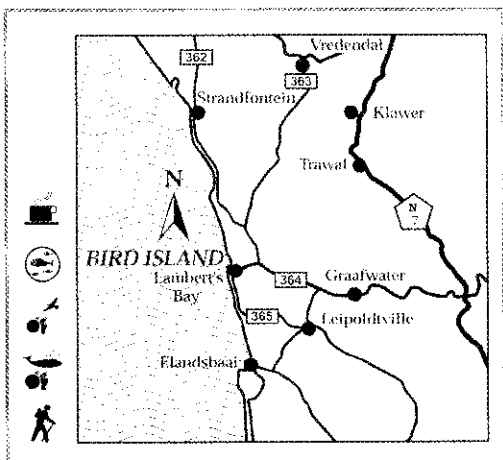
In 1967, Rocherpan was established as a nature reserve and, by way of celebration, every spring the reserve is covered in a mass of wild flowers and all are invited.

Facilities

A small interpretation centre can be found just inside of the reserve gate. Day visitors can obtain their self-issue permits here. An honesty-box is to hand. The reserve office is 100 m up the road. Rocherpan has two choices of self-catering accommodation, both are rustic and unusual.

On the edge of the pan, shielded by trees and with views across the water to the Piketberg, is a basic cottage that sleeps six people in two rooms. It has a lounge, kitchen and a shower/toilet. The kitchen is equipped with a gas fridge and stove, as well as pots, pans and utensils. Gas provides hot water and lights. While the beds do have mattresses, you will need your own bedding. The cottage has direct access to one of Rocherpan's two bird hides, both of which are built well apart on the western edge of the pan.

For lovers of the sea and the sand, a bungalow of three rondavels has been built on



deep in places, an estimated 800 000 tons worth, and at £7 a ton, not to be sneezed at. It took two years to reduce the island to bedrock. Bird Island was scraped from 1888 until 1987.

Chemicals eventually supplanted guano, but the bird life on many islands is still struggling to recover from the disturbances. On Bird Island (as elsewhere), penguins in particular suffered. Not only were their eggs collected, but their guano burrows were dug up. Eggs and chicks could no longer be protected against extreme temperatures and predation by other birds.

The gannets

It was gannets that played the biggest part in the production of African guano. In the majority on the island, the intense, un-wavering, electric blue stare of the Cape gannet is something to behold. You will think serene, but it will trouble you.

When tracking fish in times of plenty, gannets gather in large flocks and even roost on the water if needs be. They hunt by diving from a height onto shoals sometimes to a depth of five metres. Their nests are cones made of guano-covered debris that can include the bones of immediate relations. The eggs are incubated under the birds' webbed feet. They are unable to fly at night and are in danger when storms hit the island and waves sweep the colony.

Tips

- * Access to the island may be prohibited in high seas.
- * Binoculars are always useful.

- * Ask for a guided tour of the interpretation centre, and to be shown the video of the island.
- * There is no accommodation on the island but no shortage in Lambert's Bay.
- * It is not necessary to book.
- * Cellphone reception is generally good.

Getting there

If travelling from Cape Town, take the N7 towards Clanwilliam. On the approach to Clanwilliam, take the R364 Graafwater / Lambert's Bay road to the coast. Once in Lambert's Bay, follow the signs to the harbour and Bird Island. The whole journey should take no more than four hours.

Enquiries

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BIRD ISLAND

Nature Reserve



*here the colony's cohesive front belies
the individual's will to live to the last*

Background

Early morning calls swirl in the soup off Lambert's Bay. It is hard to distinguish between a foghorn and a seal, and between cormorants and what could be old men in distress somewhere. There is no wind at present on Bird Island. The visibility is nil. But a great stirring fills the air. This multitude of birds have formed a covenant in perpetuity, but are perpetually at odds.

For it is harsh here and tenuous. There is sharpness on the lips; acrid guano stifles the nostrils. And yet so utterly in place is everything, including the bickering, that the overwhelming effect is strangely comforting, like a mild soporific. Outside of the cloud all is pale-blue and shining. The sun is bearing down. Soon the fogbank shifts and lifts and it becomes harder to imagine a Divinity having watched any of this, so unconcerned and caught up are these birds in life. Some are on the wing, in fixedness, others are on the ground, in a funk. Others are preoccupied with survival checks so detailed they get down to minutiae, down even to the downy axillaries.

Every last gannet seems to know its place, image-sourced from the inherited memory bank. While in the harbour, the cormorants work themselves to distraction on elaborate and cranky preening rituals, practising a form of self-propulsion over the glassy water, as if in training for some long journey across the seas on foot.

Facilities

Bird Island is about three hectares in size but is one of the most interactive of nature reserves. Birds, seals and the fishing boats of Lambert's Bay all come and go. The breakwater that connects the island to the mainland and that creates the Lambert's Bay harbour was built in 1959. It is this that gives the public access to what is one of only six Cape gannet breeding colonies in the world.

A hide-cum-interpretation centre has been built at the site where visitors can observe at close quarters the activities of these resolute birds. Paths with interpretation en route have been laid out to allow study of the as queer and, on the surface, selfish habits of the island's other nesting and roosting birds: Cape cormorants; kelp gulls; common terns; and African penguins.

The island's visitor centre offers interpretation, coffee, curios, an aquarium, an auditorium and a penguin pool. The local community, in conjunction with Cape Nature Conservation, runs the centre.

Guano

In the beginning there was guano – decomposed bird dung accumulations otherwise known as white gold – rich in phosphates and nitrates and, from the time of the Incas, used as fertiliser. In 1841 its importation by British prospectors from an island off Peru initiated a boom and much wealth and avarice. Deposits (including those of bats) were chased down worldwide. In 1843, Ichaboe Island, off Namibia, was the first African strike. The guano there was 20 m



show you things you would otherwise walk right past. By dint of sheer experience, the guides carry a wealth of information on the reserve, the region and its people.

Fynbos hygiene

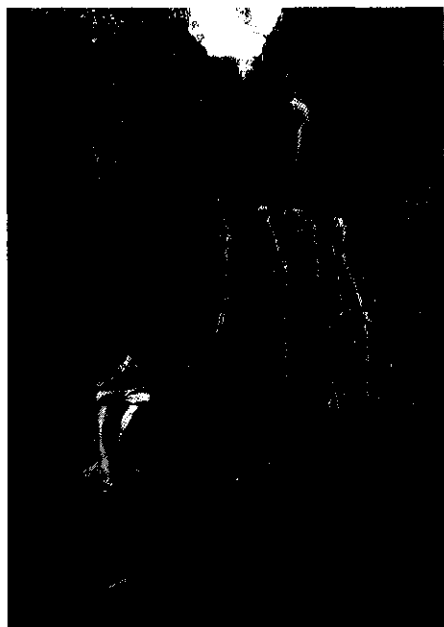
This can be a big problem in a big reserve. Apart from the visual assault, human waste can harbour disease. And mountains are sources of fresh water. The salient points of fynbos hygiene are: carry a small spade or trowel; keep at least 50 m from water when relieving yourself; bury all excreta and toilet 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.

Tips

- * Access to Nieuwoudt's Pass from the N7 can be a problem in winter. The bridge that crosses the Olifants River floods. There are alternative routes to Algeria via Citrusdal and Clanwilliam. Contact the tourism officer at Algeria before you leave.
- * Permits are required for all activities in the Cederberg. Book well in advance.
- * Cellphone reception is unreliable.

Getting there

It is about three hours (200 km) from Cape Town up the N7 to the Algeria office. About 27 km past Citrusdal take the Algeria turn-off from the N7 for Nieuwoudt's Pass. Matjiesrivier Nature Reserve is about 35 km beyond Algeria. It can also be reached from the Ceres end – through Prince Alfred Hamlet on the R303, over the Gydo Pass to



a turn-off to the right about 20 km beyond the pass. To reach the Kliphuis campsite, pass the Algeria turn-off on the N7 and proceed to Clanwilliam. Head for the Pakhuis Pass up the R364 and look out for the sign.

Enquiries and bookings

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E-mail: cederberg@cnc.org.za

each. All five cottages have gas stoves and fridges, bathrooms with hot water, and toilets. Lights are powered by a solar panel installation.

The wilderness, with its suggestion of the uncharted, of the valley of the missing link, is for the more independent hiker.

But no matter how much of a pathfinder you are, a 1:50 000 topographical map bought at the Algeria office will be indispensable.

To maintain the atmosphere and lessen the impact of people, the wilderness has been divided into three 24 000-ha hiking blocks. Groups are limited to a minimum of three and a maximum of 12 people a day. Permits are only valid for specific blocks. You will need to be well prepared. Conditions can be extreme. Fires are forbidden, so take a gas stove.

That said, the wilderness is all yours.

Matjiesrivier Nature Reserve

It is here that the eerie Stadsaal rock formations are found, where the presence of people long gone is still palpable. It is here, too, not far from the Stadsaal Caves that the

evocative elephant rock painting is found. And it is here that you will find three worlds in one. There is mountain fynbos (which the rest of the Cederberg is comprised of); central mountain renosterveld; and lowland succulent Karoo. The reserve is in the drier eastern end of the Cederberg. It was obtained in 1995 with the assistance of the WWF-SA. Renosterveld is believed to have supported herds of large game and thus predators such as lion.

Matjiesrivier is also the hub of a privately run 16-km mountain bike trail and a scenic route well suited to 4x4 vehicles.

This route is 18 km long and is perfect for a family outing. It will take you to the eastern part of the Cederberg with great views including the Wolfberg Arch.

Both routes cross private land forming part of the Cederberg Conservancy and bookings should be made in advance.

Guided hikes

While there are any number of day and overnight hiking routes to choose from in the Cederberg, consider the services of a reserve guide who, for a small fee, will

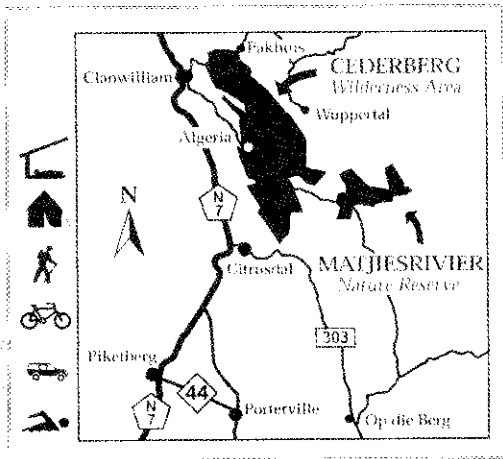


Conservancies

These came about as attitudes towards the natural environment and conservation changed. In Cederberg's case, the benefits to the public are three-fold. In effect, the reserve is now bigger and people can visit areas they would otherwise have been denied. And there is a greater choice of places to stay.

Some of the activities offered by the conservancies include: a four-day cultural route covering the history of the people of the Cederberg; a five-day horse trail; a five-day rock art route; a four-day 4x4 route; and two five-day mountain bike routes.

Along some of these routes you will visit the Englishman's Grave, that of a British soldier shot in a Boer ambush in 1901; the grave of C. Louis Leipoldt, the father of Afrikaans literature; Dwarsrivier, the most elevated wine farm in the Cape; and old stone leopard traps, built by early stock farmers. The Cederberg Conservancy website at www.cederberg.co.za has more information.



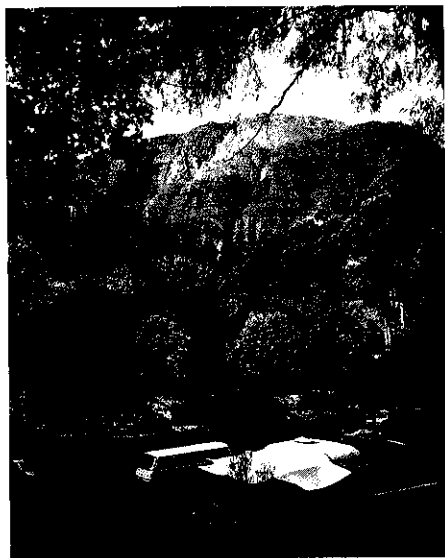
and Kliphuis. Algeria, the main camp (pictured below right), is on the Rondegat River. It has 48 sites. Kliphuis is in the far north of the reserve, in the Pakhuis Pass, 20 km from Clanwilliam. It has 10 sites on the Kliphuis River. Both Algeria and Kliphuis have hot water, but toilet paper is not supplied. Five individual campsites have power points.

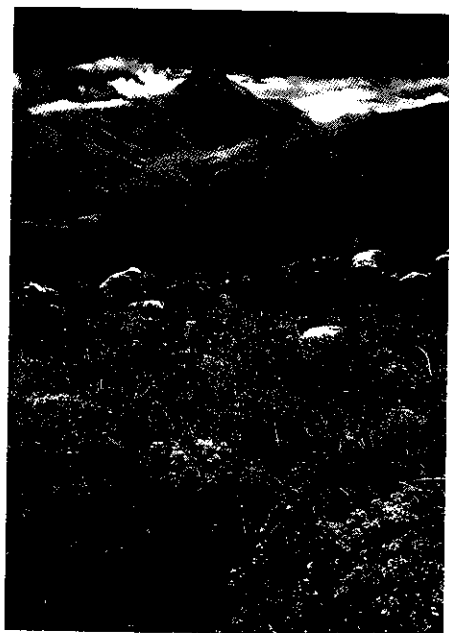
Clanwilliam is the closest big town to both, but a few kilometres from Algeria, a shop sells emergency supplies. Bring your costume in summer, as crystal clear rivers

at both places will be hard to ignore.

There are seven self-catering cottages. The two most luxurious, where you need bring only your food, toiletries and a towel, are Garskraal and Rietdak. Both are at Algeria. Rietdak sleeps five people, Garskraal eight.

Five more basic cottages are situated a few kilometres from Algeria. They do not have electricity or bed linen, but they have magnificent mountain settings. Uitkyk sleeps 10 people, Waenhuis six. Prik-se-Werf, Peerboom and Sas-se-Werf sleep four





that Marloth field rangers making their way quietly down the Kruispad from the Protea Valley overnight hut early one winter morning not too long ago, happened upon the still damp pugs of a leopard and her cubs on a rock next to the trail.

These, then, are the options, with their permutations: Eight separate one-day trails; and a testing, six-day trek across the whole reserve. The day hikes vary in length from just over a kilometre to 6 km, but with cleverly considered link-ups, 19 km can be achieved in a day.

The opposite would hold good for the six-day hike, where, on day three, or even day five, less might seem more attractive than more, and where a short-cut, but still a recognised route, can then be taken without remorse. From the outset, you could even deliberately forsake the six-day number for a straight two-day hike, with fewer heroics and greater enjoyment. You would have less to carry for a start. But then, to have spent six days and nights in the hills, to have gazed into ravines and to have made it home again? What a memory.

Mountain biking

There is no fixed cycle trail at Marloth. But there are a number of jeep tracks to

explore around the base of the mountain, both within the reserve and adjoining private plantations, where, obviously, a little decorum is required. The tracks vary in length and severity.

Tips

- * The hiking trails start and finish at the reserve office.
- * The trail register, which all hikers must complete, is designed to save lives.
- * Never walk alone.
- * Begin your hike before 9 am, to get to where you want to be before dark.
- * Stick to the trails; do not make your own detours, this is dangerous.
- * Detailed maps of Marloth and its trails are available from the office.
- * It is necessary to book in advance for the six-day trail, as well as for the guesthouse.
- * There is cellphone reception around the office, but it is only line-of-sight in the mountains.

Getting there

Coming in from the Cape Town end of Swellendam's main road, continue in to the business district and then turn left up Andrew Whyte Street. Follow this to the top and then the signboards to the reserve office, a little over a kilometre from town.

Enquiries and bookings

Tel: (028) 514 1410

E-mail: marlothnr@telkomsa.net

Bookings: Tel: (028) 425 5020

Fax: (028) 425 5030

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



DE

Nature Reserve



Regarded by the country's most endangered coastal bird as the southern Cape's most pristine estuary

Background

So unspoilt and undisturbed by humans is the De Mond estuary, that the diminutive and highly threatened Damara tern has established a breeding colony on the pebble beds between the dune fields.

The Ramsar convention now also recognises De Mond as a wetland of international importance and worthy of continued protection, specifically because of the terns.

The reserve lies at the mouth of the Heuningnes River, between the villages of Arniston (Waenhuiskrans) and Struisbaai, where it once formed part of the farms Zoetendals Vallei and Bushy Park. De Mond's saving grace – the relative lack of encroachment by humans over the years – has occurred by default. Unlike at Arniston and Struisbaai, there was no feature which lent itself to offering sheltered access to the sea and thus, ultimately, the establishment of a coastal town. And the farming that took place was always at some cost to the farmer – salt marshes have never been ideal for agriculture.

With the proclamation of a reserve in 1986, De Mond's status was further elevated. Now the only predator of note here is the unobtrusive caracal. It is said to pad its paths with quiet intent. This is wonderful, especially if we consider that it was not that long ago that elephant once strode these dunes, when the entire Agulhas plain was pretty much a milkwood forest.

Facilities

Day visitors will find a picnic under the trees alongside the river a pleasant experience, especially if enjoyed after an exploration of the reserve itself and the river, or even a spot of fishing.

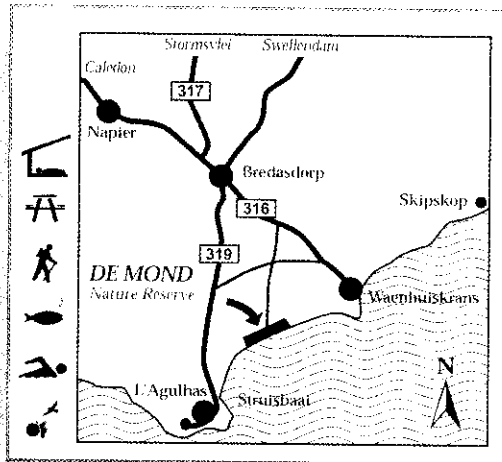
Overnight accommodation is limited to a very basic three-bedroomed house, which sleeps six. It has electricity, providing hot water and lights, an equipped kitchen and mattresses. Bring your own bedding. Due to the ever-present fire hazard, open fires are not permitted, though gas braais and Webers are.

Hiking

Named after the Damara tern (*Sterna balaenarum*), the 7-km Sterna Trail will take you on a two, maybe three-hour circular tour of the reserve. The trail begins near the office with a crossing to the south bank of the Heuningnes River, by way of a swaying, wood-and-cable suspension bridge worthy of Indiana Jones.

It then turns upstream for a kilometre or so before hiving off into the reserve. The vegetation along the way is characterised by dune milkwood thickets, limestone fynbos and dune fynbos. Eventually you will find yourself on the beach, wondering what the tide is doing. With luck you will have hard sand all the way back to the estuary mouth. Staying on the south bank of the river you will then head back to the bridge, passing as you do the warm, salt-bush shallows, countless schools of small fish and a myriad other life forms.

Another hike to consider is the four hour



De Mond to Arniston, a unidirectional trek along the coast, past Waenhuiskrans cave, and nearby fish traps and middens once used by the Khoisan. There is also the remains of an old shipping beacon near the point – a concrete structure on the beach that carried a copper ball which reflected sunlight and warned skippers of the reef.

Fishing

Grunter, steenbras, leervis, elf, cob, springer and striped harder all occur in this estuary and along the coast. A marine angling licence is required for angling in the river and estuary. The practice of catch and release is encouraged. And remember to bring your own bait, as no disturbance of organisms along the river is allowed.

Birding

The Damaras of De Mond graciously share the estuary with another resident family of émigrés, the Caspian terns, who are also endangered and who also have a breeding colony at the mouth. The Damara colony is the largest breeding colony in the Western Cape and the southernmost breeding colony in the world.

The Damara terns are so named as they were first scientifically described from a specimen found on the Namibian coast in 1852. Both species are quite particular in their feeding habits, in that they prefer to hunt alone, yet, like most true aristocrats, tolerate the company of other species when roosting. Other rare and endangered birds occurring at De Mond include the African black oystercatcher and the blue crane.

Tips

- * Vehicles are only allowed as far as the car park at the reserve entrance.
- * Try not to disturb roosting birds or their breeding colonies.
- * The closest small towns are Arniston and Struisbaai, both about 20 km away.
- * The nearest big town is Bredasdorp, about 26 km away.
- * Cellphone reception is unreliable.

Getting there

From Bredasdorp, the reserve can be approached from either the R319 to Struisbaai, or the R316 to Arniston.

Enquiries and bookings

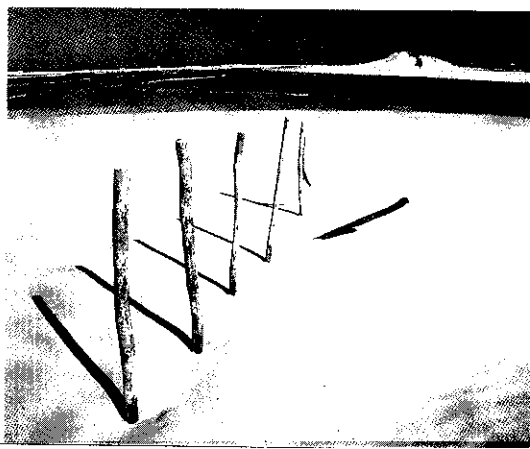
Tel: (028) 424 2170

E-mail: demond@isat.co.za

Bookings: Tel: (028) 425 5020

Fax: (028) 425 5030

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SALMONSDAM

Nature Reserve



n inland place that in name has much in common with the sea but nothing to do with fish

Background

How many people can honestly say that they knew that outside Hermanus is Stanford and that outside Stanford is Salmonsdam, the only reserve in Africa named after a now almost unknown British sea captain?

His name was Robert Salmond, his ship, the iron-sided paddle steamer, Birkenhead, that early one morning in February of 1852 struck a rock and sank, with the loss of 454 lives. The then uncharted pinnacle is situated off Danger Point, a peninsula in Walker Bay, not far from Stanford.

The Birkenhead was built as a warship, but before her launching was refitted as a troopship. And as is well known amongst the chary, nature abhors second thoughts. Which is ironic, since the Birkenhead tragedy principally recalls an act of discipline, a determination. As the ship went down, the soldiers stood by to allow the women and children on board to be got away to the life boats.

Bird watchers, hikers and nature lovers have been visiting Salmonsdam since the early 1960s, as it has always been possible to achieve a feeling of secrecy and repose here. There are spectacular kloofs and precipices and paths stretching off into heights that will soon dwarf you. And even if you have no specialist interests, a stroll amongst these hills, or through the relic forest, will certainly reward. For instance,

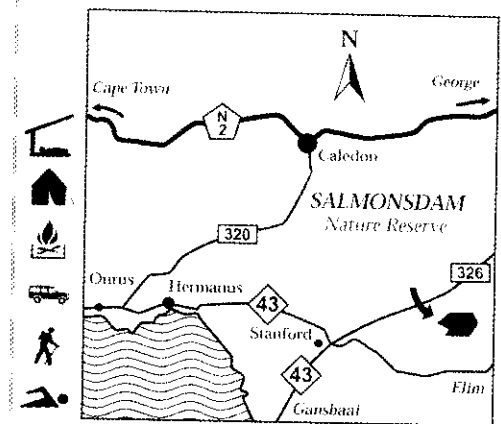
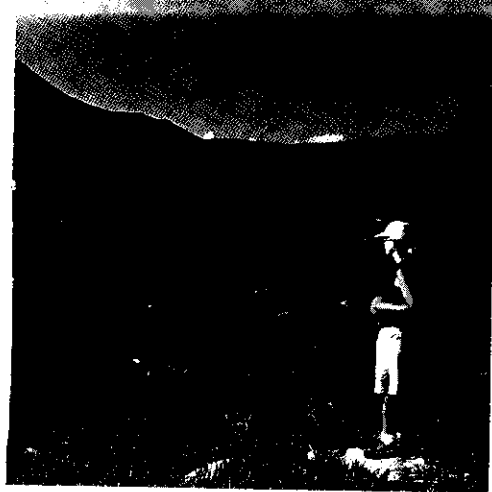
alongside some paths, you might notice the tiny carnivorous sundew plant, which, if you do not walk another step, will be fascinating enough. Sparkling, sticky red hairs on its leaves attract and trap minute prey that the leaf then envelops. A good place to reflect on these and other matters is the little dam from which the reserve also takes its name. It can be found below the campsites and while not the main attraction here, has its own mysterious appeal.

Facilities

There is nothing fancy about Salmonsdam's three overnight cabins, situated in an amphitheatre at the base of the Perdeberg, though they are adequate. One sleeps eight in three rooms, while the other two sleep four people each in one room. The larger cabin has single and bunk beds, while the other two have only bunks. The larger cabin has its own kitchenette, toilet and shower. The smaller two share an ablution block. But at the end of a long hike in the mountains, even the smaller cabins will seem commodious. All three cabins have gas stoves and fridges, but bring everything else you think you will need. Cooking and eating utensils are available on request.

Camping

Six spacious and shady campsites, which you might have to share with the resident bontebok, are situated below the cabins. They are well kept but have no electricity and share the same ablution block as the two small cabins.



Hiking

There are three recognised day hikes to choose from: the Mountain; Ravine; and Waterfall trails. None of them require any great degree of fitness or expertise.

At about 4 km, the Mountain Trail is the longest and it should only take you a couple of hours. But by sleeping over at one of the reserve's cabins you could easily make a long weekend of it, or longer. You could explore all three trails and the entire reserve.

In which case, you would be sure to find the refreshing rock pool and waterfall, caves (Leopard and Elandskrans, in particular) and Balancing Rock, which, if you were only there for the day, you could easily miss.

And you would have a far greater chance of coming across a klipspringer or a duiker. From the lookout on the Mountain Trail, you will have views of Bredasdorp, Caledon and even of Walker Bay, where the bunting on the Spirit of Birkenhead still flies.

Tips

- * You can arrange with the manager on duty to take your 4x4 to the top of Paardeberg (5 km), where there are views of Walker Bay, Bredasdorp and Caledon.
- * Bring your mountain bike. There are plenty of opportunities for riding on existing jeep tracks.
- * Salmonsdam is an ideal getaway for the whole family.
- * The nearest town is Stanford, 20 km away. Hermanus is 37 km away.

* Cellphone reception is good at the campsite and cabins.

Getting there

From Hermanus, head for Stanford. From there take the R326 (known as the Caledon road) up towards the N2. After about 4 km, take the dirt road turn-off to the right. You should see the sign. Follow it and others to Salmonsdam. An alternative route, coming from that direction, would be to take the R326 from the N2 side, about 10 km outside Riversonderend. Then head for Stanford and watch out for the Salmonsdam sign some 4 km outside of Stanford.

Enquiries and bookings

Tel: (028) 314 0062

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Bookings: Tel: (028) 425 5020

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DE

Nature Reserve & Marine Protected Area



W

hile reposing upon the humble themes of trails and vleis and whales at sea, expect the unexpected

Background

From the minute you crest the rise beyond the entrance boom and see what instead of the sea in the distance, looks like the makings of a large desert – high, white sands stark against the foreground – you know things are going to be different here.

Few other reserves offer as complete an outdoor experience as De Hoop and with accommodation to suit all tastes. There are hiking, biking, and vehicle trails. There is the sea, dunes, a vlei, birds, game, rare plant species and a mountain. And then there are the whales.

Along with the Cederberg Wilderness Area, De Hoop is one of the province's

most well-known reserves. The highly popular Whale Hiking Trail has only enhanced the dimension of all there already was to enjoy here.

The reserve gets its name from one of the earliest European settlements in the area, a horse stud called Hope Farm. Furlongs have flit by since then and the only hooves you will now hear will be those of the reserve's zebra and antelope. De Hoop was proclaimed a reserve in 1957. It was used for the breeding of animals, such as the bontebok and the equally rare Cape mountain zebra. Today, with 36 000 ha under its control (one of the largest remaining examples of indigenous lowland and coastal fynbos), management's goal is to nurture the natural ecosystems typical of this region.

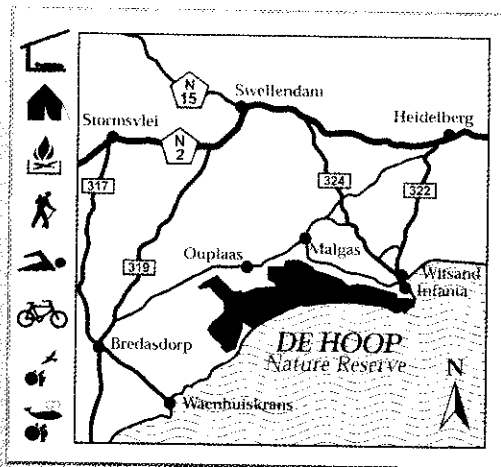
To take the objective further, a marine protected area was proclaimed in 1986. It covers the reserve's coast and extends 5 km out to sea. So bring your goggles and snorkel, the underwater world of a rock pool at low tide will confirm how different things are at De Hoop. We come from a big world, but this one is far bigger.

Facilities

De Hoop has 13 self-catering cottages or units, from basic, to fully equipped. But even the basic cottages are comfortable. There are seven of them. One sleeps 10, otherwise they sleep four in two rooms, have a bathroom (shower only) and a kitchen, with a two-plate stove, microwave, kettle, fridge, crockery and cutlery.

The three fully-equipped cottages sleep five people, also in two rooms, but they





have their own bedding and towels.

The eleventh is more a lodge than a cottage. In total seclusion above the beach at Lekkerwater, it sleeps 10 people in five rooms and is graciously appointed. Enhancing the ambiance is its lack of electricity. Gas, battery operated lanterns and candles are the energy sources. Firewood is also supplied. The lodge telephone is coin-operated. Cellphones cannot be relied upon out here. Whale watching in season, though, is a different story, related with many superlatives.

The twelfth is at Koppie Alleen, where the environmental education facility, has now been made available to the public. It is close to the beach and ideal for larger groups with dormitory style accommodation, solar lighting in the kitchen, fridge and freezer facilities. Guests must bring their own bedding and towels.

Lastly, you can also experience old-world charm when staying in the old homestead next to the office complex and the De Hoop vlei. It is fully equipped, has three bedrooms and sleeps 10 people.

Camping

The reserve has 10 campsites each with parking for a caravan. They are situated amongst trees near the De Hoop office and the cottages, and look out over a section of the vlei.

They have their own taps and braai places. There are no power points, but there is hot water at the ablution block and washing up facilities. Limited freezer space is available at the office.

Birding

Known to amateur and working ornithologists alike, the De Hoop vlei is forever changing. A wetland recognised by the Ramsar Convention as being of international importance, the vlei's uniqueness lies in its partial location in a gorge, while for the most part it is a 16 km-long lake, blocked off from the sea by coastal dunes.

Salinity levels rise and fall, as does the



The Whale Hiking Trail

There is something primordial in peoples' response to the return of the whale. The attraction for humans of other primates should be obvious to all, but to watch for hours the ponderous movements of an almost obscured whale, speaks of a deeper connection.

The southern right whales migrate north from the sub-Antarctic in winter. They visit our inshore waters from May to December, where they mate, calve and rear young. De Hoop's five-day trail will keep you in almost continuous communion with these creatures. Even at night you will hear their breathing. And imagine an aerial display at sunrise (adult right whales can weigh 65 tons). But to enjoy this in such inspiring surroundings is what makes the De Hoop experience. Add to this, your accommodation: well conceived, characterful cottages in amazing settings.

The trail has no equal. It starts at Potberg, in the eastern inland sector of the reserve. Here you leave your car and overnight. The next day will see you to the top of the Potberg, with views in every direction, before trekking to Cupidoskraal (pictured top right on page 51). Day two will take you back up the mountain and then wind you down to the coast at Noetsie, with its enchanting cove. Day three sets you on to the rugged seaboard to Hamerkop (pictured above), with snorkelling in azure waters along the way. Day four is a lovely long walk down the beach to Vaalkrans. The last day ends at Koppie Alleen and a shuttle bus back to your car at Potberg. High up on Koppie Alleen, if you have the time and as a final salute, it is possible to see dozens of whales up and down the coast. Many move into the broad, shallow surf zone, where the waves roll right over them.



water level, drawing in or driving away a variety of birds throughout the year, especially waders and waterfowl.

Over at the Potberg side of the reserve resides a rather more beleaguered group of birds, adventurers from the Old World, 120 at the last count. So rare are these Cape vultures that theirs is the only remaining breeding colony in the Western

Cape. They were once common and widespread throughout the region and southern Africa. You will see members of this remnant fleet sailing gracefully around the Potberg. What is encouraging is that the colony has grown steadily since the mid-1980s, when their numbers dropped

to a low of 40 birds. This growth is attributed to the introduction of feeding programmes and an awareness campaign directed at local landowners.

Mountain biking

While biking is possible on most of the roads around the De Hoop side of the reserve, and no special permit is required, the dedicated trail on the Potberg side requires advance booking and a permit, and a little more than a holidays-only approach to the sport. Allow three days for what should be a memorable adventure.

After leaving your vehicle at the Potberg Environmental Education Centre, you will ride all your equipment and food 11 km to Cupidoskraal. This basic cottage is the base from which you can make daily excursions of between 14 and 27 km.

These out-and-back routes vary in grades from moderate to difficult. They will take you down to five different points





along this spectacular coast, where you can picnic, swim or snorkel.

Walks and drives

These are activities suited to both day visitors and those on a longer stay. There are two drives and a number of walking trails, but combinations are also possible. The trails are laid out at the vleis, along the coast and at Potberg. One of the drives takes you to an area above the vlei, the other down to the coast at Koppie Alleen (pictured above left), with game viewing and birding at every turn. But you can stop for a walk or a picnic wherever you choose.

Tips

- * There is no shop at the reserve; the nearest is 15 km away at Ouplaas.
- * Fuel is also only available at Ouplaas.
- * Bredasdorp is the nearest town (60 km).
- * Horseflies in late summer can be an annoyance – bring insect repellent.
- * There are no water points along the routes of either the Whale Hiking Trail or the Mountain Bike Trail – bring water.
- * Set off early and try to gauge the tides in order to get the most out of the rock pools.
- * A public telephone (cards only) is located near the cottages.
- * Cellphone reception is fairly reliable.
- * Bikers may proceed directly to the parking area at Potberg. The keys are available at the Cupidoskraal hut.

Getting there

From Cape Town, take the N2 to Caledon. From Caledon, head for Bredasdorp. From Bredasdorp, take the R319 for Swellendam. After a few kilometres, turn right at the De Hoop sign and follow this dirt road for about 60 km to the reserve. The entire journey will take about three unhurried hours (± 230 km). The reserve may also be reached from either end of Swellendam on the N2 and another 50 km of gravel road.

Enquiries and bookings

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Fax: (028) 425 5030

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Explore our reserves in

the CENTRAL KAROO

CENTRAL KAROO

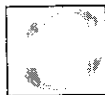


he Karoo is far and away the most atmospheric of regions. This is where one goes when one needs space and silence, or to be alone, or to be alone with one's nearest and dearest. This is where one goes to recoup and take stock. No other landscape in the Western Cape offers as dramatic an expanse. And, as every philosopher knows: the greater the expanse, the greater the introspection. Here are kopies in just the right places, road signs from a bygone era and tracks undulating off into nowhere. And on the edges of these flatlands are huge mountains dwarfed by distance. The plants and vegetation, too, seem dwarfed. Succulents, vygies, spekboom, aloes. Where some are dormant, others are flowering. Life, they say, goes on, but the plains of the Karoo go on forever. They will bring to your soul a sigh the pleasure of which it had all but forgotten.



ANYSBERG

Not far from here



ne of those unheard of places; once visited never forgotten. A must if you have ever wondered about the Karoo. Its dreamy spirit will touch the outsider in you.

This is the Karoo, wild and uncertain. And although too wild for some, some think some of it is not wild enough. It is this that hides Anysberg. They call it the Little Karoo, but it remains unbelittled, and Anysberg as remote as ever. And what better place to kick back in? Here you can give pretty much no thought at all to man's obsession with activity. All you need is a seat in the shade outside your cottage, a book and a pair of binoculars. But to stretch

your legs or shake off a bemused state, take a stroll at dawn or one into dusk – you might put up a black-footed cat and notice it. Wild fowl and chance rarities will be your reward for an hour spent sitting quietly at one of the old farm dams, with drooping eyelids and a hat on your head.

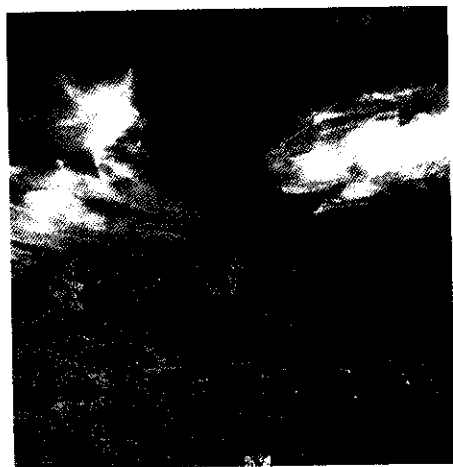
The ancient lands of Anysberg were proclaimed a reserve in 1988. Game species that once populated this semi-aridness before the arrival of the colonists, have been returned, though a few survived the years despite their persecution, leopard in particular. One could imagine these cats being wilder now than they have ever been. As to the other animals that again roam the dusty scrub, they might never have left.

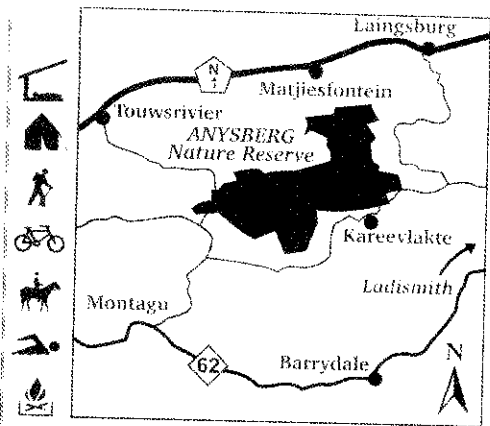
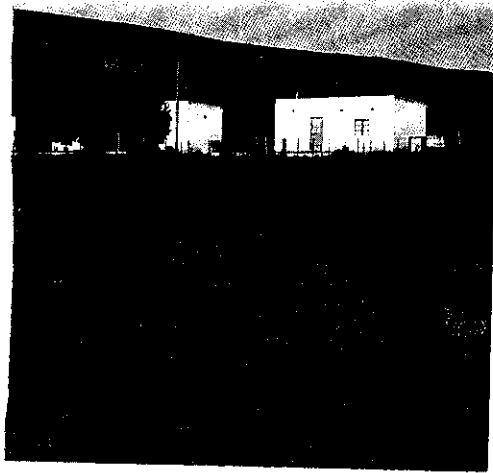
What has been lost, apparently forever, is part of the reserve that was once a farm called Vrede, whose remaining buildings now serve as reception and office.

Anysberg lies on the southern edge of the Little Karoo. Mountains, flat lands, koppies and kloofs are all there is for miles. Desperate places with names such as Kareevlakte, Hondewater and Plathuis are as close as you can get to civilised life.

Further afield, the reserve's nearest towns, clockwise, are: Laingsburg; Ladismith; Barrydale; Montagu; and Touws River. Anysberg is more or less in the middle of them and comprises an area of about 63 000 ha.

Bear in mind that where nights in winter can freeze over, summer months can boil. But choose your moon and there would be nothing to prevent you from lying up during the day in an unused antbear





burrow, dark and cool (or in the Vrede or trail hut pools), and then striking out at night, either on foot or on your bike.

RODENTS

Rustic as celebration is the key here. There is a row of what today you would call labourers' cottages, five of them, though each one harks to a time longer gone. They are as romantic as the landscape itself – inward, reclusive and calming, thanks, in part, to the absence of any electricity. Humanity's old ally, the flame, will be your source of energy. Candles (bring extras if you enjoy light); a wood stove (doubles as a brazier in winter); and an outdoor braai

(hard men might prefer their own grids) are improvements worth noting. Firewood is available, at a small fee.

Cape Nature Conservation's only nod to progress is in fitting each cottage with a gas stove, fridge, and running water. The communal ablution facility, situated between the cottages, is spacious and clean. There are showers, flush toilets, hand basins, and mirrors. Hot water to the showers is via a donkey geyser, fired up with wood every evening by the reserve staffers, amidst a great billowing of smoke. You will need to bring with you bedding, food and refreshments. Cooking and eating utensils are supplied. All the cottages have single beds.

The horse trail

There is a small herd of horses at Anysberg. At first glance they appear feral. Closer inspection will show that they are well groomed. Management refers to them as "free-range". They are living their lives out on the plains, but when needed for the trail, or a short ride, a staff member's whistle and a call (denoting oats) will have them reporting to the tack room for duty. They are quiet, well-behaved animals and you need no experience to ride them.

Accompanied by a staffer, the two-day circular trail will take you to an overnight cabin in a kloof.

Here you will fall asleep under the stars, perhaps to a jackal's cry. You will have to take your own food and personal effects (5 kg max). Wood, cutlery and mattresses are provided, as are tack and saddlebags. Water is also available. For comfort, rather ride in track-suit pants than jeans. The trail is limited to six riders.



An area of lawn under eucalyptus in front of the office has been set-aside for campers and caravaners, but again, you will find no plug socket. Survival is the key here. You can tell this in the responses you elicit from the people in the self-catering cottages. The looks travellers get upon entering cities.

Wherever you venture in Anysberg, you are likely to find yourself thinking of the dawning of humanity, of the Khoisan and of the colonists. Archaeological sites are found throughout the reserve. Rock paintings and ruins will add to your sense of wonder, of the people who lived or passed through this arid region.

Nowhere is this more striking than in Prinspoort, a tremendous gorge cutting through Anysberg Mountain. One could spend the best part of a day exploring here, tracking the watercourse and feeling small. You will have to do it on foot, of course, as there is no other way. This is not Ratanga Junction. So go prepared.

For those who enjoy their bike and like to strike out alone, simply find a track and follow it. Anysberg has many. Or if you would prefer, attach those panniers, take to the pony trail and spend a night in the hills. It is a 26 km return and a not-so-difficult ride, made easier by frequent stops.

Or you could ride down to Prinspoort (28 km return), park your bike in an erstwhile dry-stone sheep kraal, slip on a day-pack and explore on foot.

One point: management is not keen on horses and bikes on the pony trail together, it sullies the experience for both and creates a clash at the overnight hut. So speak to the staff first, as it is possible to cycle the trail and be back at Vrede before the horses set out at noon.

Bathing costumes are not always associated with the Karoo, but there is a swimming pool close to the Vrede office complex. Actually, it is a reservoir, but being wonderfully cool, clean and deep, it is a place you will relish in the hotter months, floating around amidst the incredible panorama. There is a similar pool at the pony trail's overnight hut. And if you are lucky, there will be rock pools in Prinspoort.

Fill your fuel tank in Laingsburg or Ladismith, depending on your route. This will allow you not only to get to the reserve, but away again.

It is 7 km from the Anysberg turn-off to the reserve gate. And another 16 km from the gate to Vrede (the cottages are nearby).

There is no cellphone reception, but there is a telephone at the office.

The cottages can hold 20 souls, all told. Bedding can be supplied at a small fee.

Ladismith is probably your best bet for supplies, depending on how long you intend staying.

There are basically two approaches to the reserve: from Ladismith and the R62; and from Laingsburg and the N1. The latter is the quicker route, the former the more exciting. Once you leave the tar on the N1 or the R62, you will not see it again until your return. But the dirt roads are good, wonderful if you have a 4x4, but conquerable in an Uno. Cape Town is 350 km or about four hours drive away.

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SWART

Nature Reserve

including

GAMKASKLOOF

CENTRAL KAROO



here old roads still wind up tight contours and down into lonely places

Background

Some dream of islands, others of yachts, anything to get away. It was no different in the 1830s. People dreamt of the Swartberg and of the Gamkaskloof within – insular, aloof places even by today's small world standards. They sought and found there a life free of strictures in a kind of natural stricture – the long, green valley that came to be called The Hell. They could only get there on foot and with the help of pack donkeys. It was a day's journey from the Calitzdorp side, down a rickety track known as The Ladder, or along the Gamka River gorge. Then, when they reached the almost 20 km-long valley, they still had a trudge to their dwellings, staggered intentionally at far cries from one another.

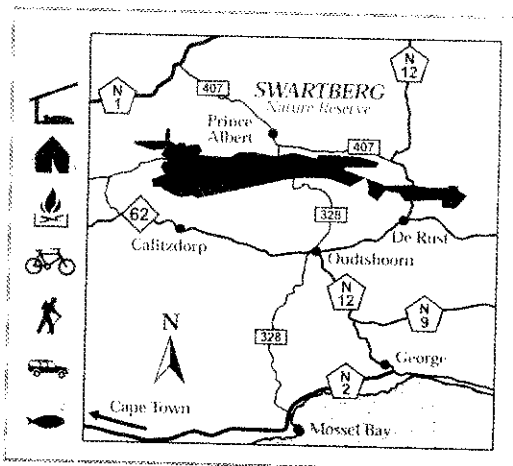
Needless to say, they had a difficult time of it, and by the 1990s were all gone. For the lives they tried to establish and the stories that gathered around them soon began to draw outsiders in, and it was not long before a road was built, in 1962, to be precise. Ironically, some say it was this road that killed the valley. What adds to the romance, for us, abstrusely, is that it is one of the nicest roads in the country, steep in parts, and torturous, but so wondrous you wish it would never end. As with the road that serves it: the Swartberg Pass, an old-world classic. It was declared a national monument in its centenary in 1988.

Gamkaskloof was declared a national

heritage site in 1997. The valley is of ecological, archaeological and cultural-historical importance and is now managed as part of the Swartberg Nature Reserve. The reserve's vegetation is remarkably diverse, featuring renosterveld, mountain fynbos, Karoo-veld, spekboom veld, and numerous bulb species. Some species are in bloom almost throughout the year.

Facilities

If you are looking to understand a little of what went on in the Swartberg down the years, you are spoilt for choices. You can hike, cycle, drive and even sleep in these mountains. Over the crest, on the Prince Albert side of the pass, is the Old Toll, an



overnight cottage used by hikers beginning and ending their trails. There are a further two overnight huts on the trail, at Bothashoek and Gouekrans. The Gouekrans hut has four rooms and a cooking/dining area built into the rocks.

No fires are allowed at these huts.

The hiking trail is limited to 18 people, as the Bothashoek hut can only sleep 18 people. These are basic huts and you should bring everything you think you will need to survive. Bunk beds and mattresses are provided, as are toilets and cold showers. The Bothashoek hut has three rooms and a kitchen/dining room.

Down in the Valley of the Lions, the Gamkaskloof, things are quite different to what you might imagine. The emphasis is on comfort. Seven original valley cottages (one pictured opposite) have been restored and are run as self-catering houses, with fridges, stoves and hot water. They vary in size, sleeping between four and seven people each. Cutlery, utensils and bedding are provided, but you will need to bring your own food and toiletries.

There is a campsite at the top end of the valley, with 10 sites, ablution and braai facilities. The bush shelter at the bottom end of the valley is a no-frills dormitory with 12 beds, braai, toilet and hot shower.

Wood can be bought in the valley, though supplies are limited.

This is a privilege few overlanders have had. The 73,2 km out-and-back Swartberg 4x4 Route covers an area until recently closed to the public. You will find yourself cutting southeast, more or less straight across the top of the Swartberg, with views for hundreds of kilometres in almost every direction. The scenery is rugged.

In parts, the road is painstaking and vehicles, drivers and passengers will be sorely tested. A maximum of 20 vehicles are allowed on the route and a minimum of two. Gate keys must be fetched from and returned to the nature conservation office in Oudtshoorn, or the tourism information centre in Prince Albert. The route will take you the best part of a day to complete. You can overnight at the 36 km mark.

Firewood is not provided, and 4x4 trailists overnighing at Gouekrans might like to bring their own.

The trail is closed periodically due to rain damage.

As Paul Leger, author of *A Guide to Mountain Bike Trails* puts it: no visit to the

Hiking

The options here range from easy day hikes – both in the Swartberg and down in Gamkaskloof – to a strenuous five-day trek through the mountains. The latter has three alternative starting points. One from the Oudtshoorn side of the mountain, at De Hoek; one from the Old Toll, on the pass; and the other from the Prince Albert side, near the bottom of the pass. This five-day trek can be shortened. Water is available at the overnights and in places along the route, but hikers should also carry their own to be on the safe side.

The 6-km Grootkloof Trail, in Gamkaskloof, is an interesting interpretive trail (a point-to-point booklet is provided) that gives an idea of how early inhabitants eked out their livings. A highlight being the ruin of Tant Lenie Marais' Agter-Osberg cottage, which she apparently built herself and to which she would on occasion repair. She lived, for the most, in one of the better houses in the valley proper, (pictured above) which she also built. Clearly, far out was not nearly far out enough for Tant Lenie.





Karoo is complete until you have taken on the Swartberg Pass and the road to Hell and back. He does suggest a back-up vehicle, however. Talking of comfort, be aware that in the mountains, headwinds, crosswinds, tailwinds and even up-draughts can come at you simultaneously in a hurtful and unfavourable manner.

Things to note

- * Petrol is not available in Gamkaskloof. It is about 40 km from the turn-off at the pass to the valley floor. This can take two hours.

- * Permits are required for the hiking and 4x4 routes.

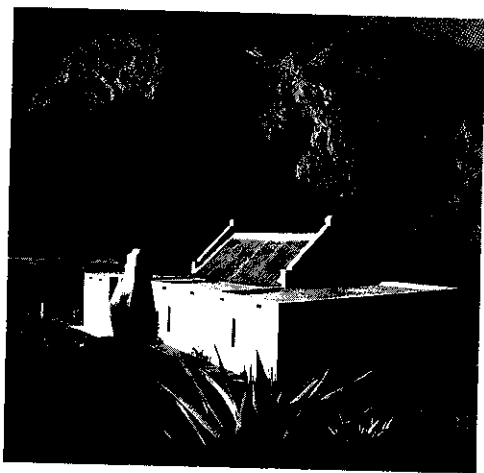
- * Book your activities and accommodation well in advance.

- * The Gamkaskloof office, once the house of the valley's last permanent resident, is across the river Gamka causeway, at the valley's nether end. It is something of a living museum. Interpretive signs at each of the historical houses also highlight their links to the past.

- * Cellphone reception is sporadic in the heights, but non-existent in the valley.

Getting there

From the N1 at Prince Albert Road, and thence via Prince Albert and up the Swartberg Pass. Or from Oudtshoorn on the R328. An alternative approach is up the



Matjiesrivier dirt road from Calitzdorp. It runs for more than 40 km through backwaters right below the Swartberg and emerges at the base of the pass. The turn-off for Gamkaskloof is below the crest of the pass, on the Prince Albert side.

Enquiries and bookings

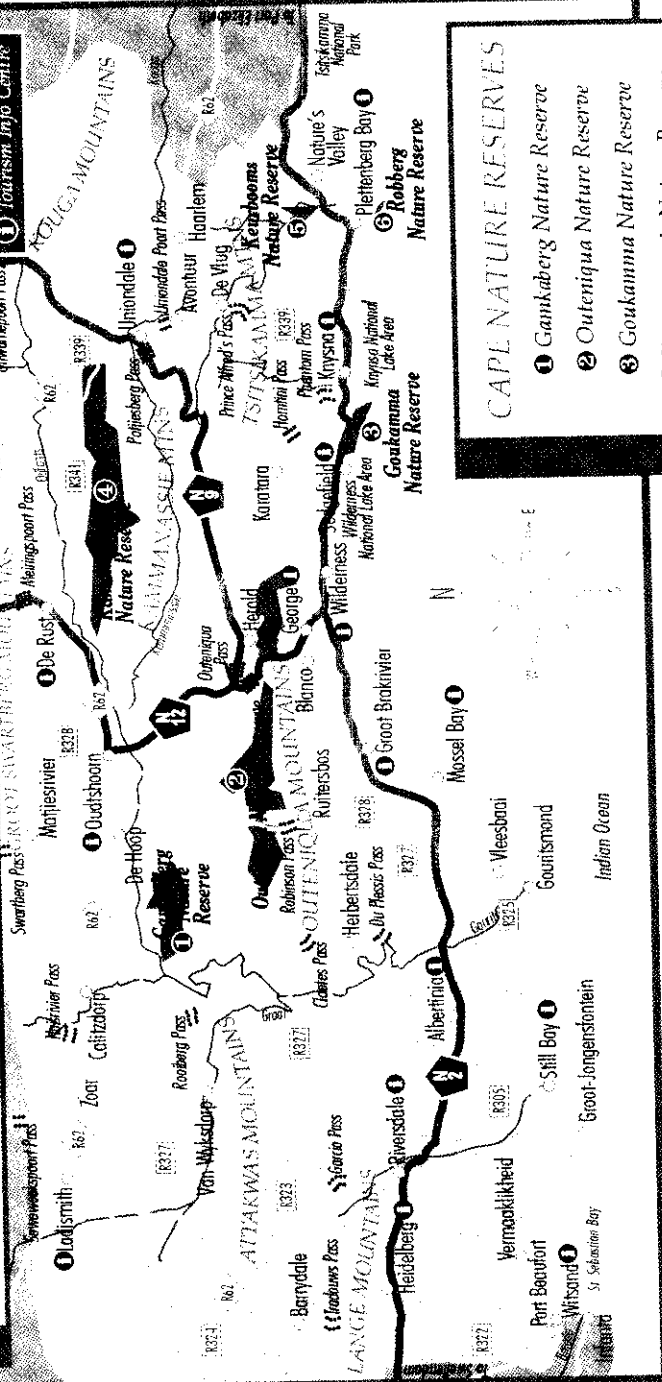
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National Route
 Tarred Road
 Untarred Road
 Tourism Info Centre

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 Untarred Road
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CAP NATURE RESERVES

- 1 Gamkberg Nature Reserve
- 2 Outeniqua Nature Reserve
- 3 Goukamma Nature Reserve
- 4 Kammanassie Nature Reserve
- 5 Kourbooms Nature Reserve
- 6 Robberg Nature Reserve