

# PROBUS ADVENTURE:

*Sunday 23 – Saturday 29 August 2020*

*The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new lands but seeing with new eyes.*

*Marcel Proust 1871 – 1922*

Over the six nights and seven days we will experience remote areas of the Swartberg Mountains and Groot and Klein Karoo and some unique small towns. We will cover >1000 km and some of the most spectacular passes in South Africa, including the Swartberge big three (Seweweeks Poort, Swartberg Pass and Meiringspoort) and the Tradouw Pass through the Langeberg Mountains - >20 passes and poorts (*pass* - a navigable route through a mountain range or over a ridge; *poort* - a steep and narrow mountain pass, usually following a river or stream). The travel times indicated do not include stops. Most vehicles can manage but a good clearance is desirable because of some gravel roads.

Driving tip: When descending down long or steep passes engage lower gears (put automatic vehicles in manual) to assist with braking – brakes can over-heat.

## ***What to take***

This is a relaxed and informal adventure. Travel light and include gear and protection for hiking if so inclined, warm clothing as the Karoo nights can be cold, torch/headlamp etc., and some cash for travel drinks and snacks. Drinks available at all stops.

For information about the amazing geological formations see books such as: Nick Norman & Gavin Whitfield *Geological journeys*, Nick Norman *Geology off the beaten track* and John Rogers *Geological adventures in the fairest Cape*. A detailed map of the region is strongly recommended: Slingsby *Swartberg and Klein-Karoo*

## ***Day 1: Sunday 23 August***

Travel separately and meet at 12h00 at The Coffee shop at Matjiesfontein for a light lunch. 250 km, 3 hours. (leave home earlier for their museums). Depart 13h30 to Bosch Luys Kloof via Laingsburg. 113 km, 1 h 40 min.

**Du Toit's Kloof Pass:** This pass (tunnel) was constructed between 1984 and 1988 at the then staggering cost of R125 000 000. It has a parallel tunnel awaiting commissioning for traffic, which at present is an escape route from the traffic tunnel.

**Hex River Poort:** 1860's. Entry to the Hex River Valley.

**Hex River Pass:** 1860's. Exit to the Hex River Valley

## ***Matjiesfontein***

The town owes its existence to the railway line connecting Cape Town to Kimberley's diamond fields. The station was called Matjiesfontein after the sedge used by the original inhabitants to make mats (matjies) for the construction of their huts. James Logan, a Scotsman, bought the land in 1884 and opened a refreshment station for the trains. He secured the catering contract for the railways and the discovery of corrupt

deals led to the fall of Rhodes' government in 1893. Logan was also considered as one of the founders of South African cricket.

The Milner Hotel was built by Logan in 1899 and was used as a military hospital for British forces during the Anglo-Boer War and some 10 000 British troops camped there at the time.

The cemetery, at a koppie a few km on the Cape Town side, includes the graves of British Army Major-General Andrew Wauchope (1846-1899), who was killed in action at the battle of Magersfontein, the English cricketer George Lohmann, and Logan.

In testament, the entire village of Matjiesfontein was preserved as a National Heritage Site in 1975 under the direction of revered hotelier, David Rawdon

## ***Laingsburg***

The settlement was initially known as Buffelsrivier, and after some name-changes it was named Laingsburg, after John Laing, the Commissioner of Crown Lands in the Cape Colony. It became a municipality in 1904.

The Laingsburg district saw action during the later years of the Anglo-Boer War and three blockhouses were constructed in the district.

In 1981 the Buffels River, augmented by the Wilgenhout and Baviaans Rivers, swept Laingsburg in a wall of water some 10 meters above its usual flow level. People, livestock, motor vehicles, furniture, orchards, vineyards and entire houses were swept away in the raging torrent.

Two-thirds of Laingsburg's infrastructure was destroyed - 184 houses and 23 commercial buildings, including the town's old age home. Of the 104 lives lost, 72 bodies were never recovered. Some of the victims' bodies were recovered in Mossel bay, some 200 km distant having been swept over the Floriskraal Dam wall. Floods were experienced again in 2008 and 2014 but damage was minimal.

**Rooinek Pass:** 1994. 3.15 km. Approximately 17 km South of Laingsburg.

**The Witnekke Pass:** Just beyond Rooinek Pass.

**Koueveld Pass:** 1994. This gravel road pass lies on the northern side of the Klein Swartberge Mountains about 10 km from Seweweeks Poort.

**Bosluisvloof Pass:** 1863. A spectacular gravel road pass with steep unguarded drop-offs. Completed by Thomas Bain's brother in law, Adam de Smidt, it is named after the many fossilised ticks found in the rocks. It was the main road between Laingsburg and Prince Albert until the late 1960's when the Department of Water Affairs built the Gamkakloof Dam.

## ***Day 2: Monday 24 August***

All day at *Bosch Luys Kloof*, which includes all meals. They offer hikes, drives, 4X4 routes, guided tours on their vehicles (expensive?), relax etc.

<https://www.boschluyskloof.co.za/reserve/home>

## ***Day 3: Tuesday 25 August***

Depart 08h30 after breakfast, through the Seweweeks Poort to Calitzdorp, where we could view tapestries in the Dutch Reformed Church hall and/or visit a port/wine farm. Via the Red Hills and Kruisrivier we aim to get to *The Retreat at Groenfontein* for lunch. 103 km.

**Seweweeks Poort:** 1862. Through the Klein Swartberge Mountains this is probably the most beautiful 18 km stretch of gravel road in South Africa, with 26 drifts and amazing geology. On the Western side is the Seweweekspoort Peak, which, at 2325 m is the highest peak in the Western Cape. Falling under the control of Cape Nature Conservation, more specifically the Swartberg and Towerkop Nature Reserves, the Poort is a Unesco World Heritage Site.

<https://mountainpassessouthafrica.co.za/find-a-pass/western-cape/item/263-seweeweeks-poort.html>

**Huisrivier Pass:** 1896. 13.4 km long between two valleys in the Klein Karoo between Zoar and Calitzdorp.

### ***Calitzdorp***

In 1821, land was granted to JJ and MC Calitz who named it Buffelsvlei after the local vegetation and animals. They donated land for the Dutch Reformed Church and school in 1853. A larger school and church were completed in 1912. The church has a neo-Byzantine style with a Marseilles roof and is a good example of the sandstone architecture of the ostrich-era in the Little Karoo. The organ was imported from Hamburg, Germany, has 1495 pipes and cost £2400. The church was declared a national monument in 1991.

The geology of the region is unique and includes the 'Buffelsfontein formation', one of the first truly African sediments. Parts of these conglomerates and Breccias are rich in haematite, which oxidised to a reddish colour.

Today this Klein Karoo community is known as the Port Wine capital of South Africa and the fruit basket of Kannaland (a municipality in the Western Cape Province, its largest towns are Ladismith, Zoar and Calitzdorp).

Coetzees Poort: Just beyond the Red Hills

**Kruisrivierpoort:** 2.2 km. On road from *Kruisrivier* (has artists and crafters - recommended stopping point) to *The Retreat at Groenfontein*. It is narrow in places and one may have to reverse back to allow safe passing. The rule is to give way to ascending vehicles.

## ***Day 4: Wednesday 26 August***

All day at *The Retreat at Groenfontein*, including all meals. Options include hikes, exploring or chilling out. <https://www.groenfontein.com/>

## ***Day 5: Thursday 27 August***

Leave *The Retreat at Groenfontein* after breakfast at 08h30 for Prince Albert via Buffelskloof, Oudtshoorn and the Meiringspoort Pass 170 km 2h30. We aim to get to Prince Albert in time for lunch at 12h30. Sites to see: the Fransie Pienaar Museum, Gays's Guernsey Dairy (famous for its cheeses) <http://www.gaysguernseydairy.com/> Prince Albert Gallery (art), Karoo Looms etc. Ailsa Tudhope takes us on an historical walk 16h30 – 18h00. We will be given an organ demonstration in the Dutch Reformed Church by Brian Cumming who lives in Prince Albert 18h00 - 18h30. Dinner at 19h30. Overnight at the *Swartberg Hotel* (lunch, dinner and breakfast).

**Buffelskloof (Coetzees Poort)** with its red mountains.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSkifM-9UL0&list=UUTiZOL2RkHkf3W5tXmPMp7g&index=1127>

**Meiringspoort:** 1858. A Top 10 destination, the poort has a history of severe floods and landslides amongst incredible hardships. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=muNmp\\_llr7k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=muNmp_llr7k)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJfEQIaHfHQ>

**Klaarstroom**, a unique Victorian village with an Anglo/Boer War history.

**Kredouws Pass:** 1999. Along the beautiful Prince Albert Valley (devastated by fires and drought) between Prince Albert and the farming hamlet of Klaarstroom, within the northern sector of the awe-inspiring Swartberge Mountain range.

**Swartberg Pass:** 1888. 23.8 km. The pass over the Groot Swartberge is a national monument and, like its sister, the Montagu Pass, stands in defiance of modern technology. A plaque at the summit, commemorates the efforts of those who built the pass. Thomas Bain, with the help of some 250 convict labourers built the pass from 1883 to 1886. This, the last pass that he built in the Cape, was surely his opus magnum. The final cost of the pass, including some access roads, was £14,500, excluding the value of the free convict labour.

<https://www.mountainpassessouthafrica.co.za/find-a-pass/western-cape/item/126-swartberg-pass-r328-p0369.html>

**Witkranspoort:** Approaching Prince Albert on the tarred road this short poort is the final bit of mountain scenery (note green lichen) before reaching the Karoo town, Prince Albert.

### ***Prince Albert***

The original farm was given to Zacharias de Beer in 1762, who called it 'De Queekvallei'. Known as Albertsburg when it obtained municipal status in 1845, it was renamed Prince Albert in honour of Queen Victoria's consort, Prince Albert.

The town still uses a lei water system, using water channelled from the mountains, at first controlled by a Water Controller, but now operates under an honesty system.

There used to be five watermills in the district, but only one remains in working order. It was built in 1850 and operated until 1972.

Many buildings in Prince Albert have the town's unique Prince Albert gable. Dating from 1840 to 1860 they were mostly built by Carel Lotz from Tulbagh. The Dutch Reformed Church was completed in 1865 with the bell and the clock imported from London. Prince

Albert became a British garrison during the Anglo-Boer War in 1899 and was the site of several clashes between the British and Boer forces during this period, when British forces used the church as a lookout and a fort.

Gold was discovered in Price Albert in 1870. The Cape Colonial secretary instructed two well-known geologists, Dr William Atherstone and Thomas Bain, to investigate. Atherstone submitted a report to the Cape House of Assembly in early 1872, stating that he considered the rocks in that district “too young” to host a productive goldfield. However, a second find in 1891 started a gold rush and a population boom. But the gold mined turned out to be minimal - all in all, 504 oz. of gold were found at these diggings.

Apartheid forced the coloured communities in Prince Albert out of the town and to move to the North-End Township in 1962. Their houses were demolished and their possessions, including livestock, were removed. This shameful episode is displayed in the museum.

### ***Day 6: Friday 28 August***

Leave Prince Albert after breakfast at 08h00 to Barrydale via Meiringspoort, Oudtshoorn, Calitzdorp, Van Wyksdorp 315 km (4h15). Lunch at the Rooiberg Lodge. Overnight and breakfast at the Karoo Art Hotel - dinner at Bistro Blues. Explore the amazing House of Books, local crafts, and winery or relax.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJfEQlaHfHQ>

**Rooiberg Pass:** 1928 14 km; 69 bends including 6 hairpin bends; wonderful scenery.

<https://mountainpassessouthafrica.co.za/find-a-pass/western-cape/item/506-rooiberg-pass-part-1.html>

**Assegaibosch Pass:** 3 km; separated from Rooiberg Pass by a plateau; 22 bends, corners curves or curves; single width in sections.

<https://mountainpassessouthafrica.co.za/find-a-pass/western-cape/item/1176-assegaibosch-pass-p1661.html>

**Tradouwshoek Pass** (not to be confused with the Tradouw Pass to the south of Barrydale): At the north-east of Barrydale, has lovely views over the Barrydale valley and farms.

## **Barrydale**

Farmers moved into this area in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Land was purchased to build the Dutch Reformed Church in 1878. A municipality was established in 1921. In 1940 the Barrydale Koöperatiewe Wynkelder was formed and a distillery established. Its Joseph Barry Brandy was voted best brandy in the world in 2003. Today's population of >4000 permanent residents increases dramatically in the tourist season, with visitors drawn by arts and crafts displays.

## ***Day 7: Saturday 29 August***

Barrydale to Cape Town via the Tradouw Pass to Swellendam. Perhaps stop for pies at Ou Meul, Riviersonderend and break at Peregrine Farm Stall, which offers fast tea/coffee and snacks. 270 km, 3 h 25 min.

**Tradouw Pass:** 1873. (Meaning Women's Path in the old Khoi language) 16 km. Joins Barrydale and Swellendam through the Langeberg Mountains and was originally built by Thomas Bain. In revamping the engineering teams preserved the environment and retained Thomas Bain's character in the design and supporting stonework.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWHk-kE0s7k>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jUYXTR4Nh6g>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YpKRq\\_POHqM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YpKRq_POHqM)

**Houw Hoek Pass:** 1682. Newer pass built shortly after completing the Sir Lowry's Pass in 1833. Houw Hoek or 'Hold Corner' is derived from the need to hold back, or slow down the ox-wagons whilst negotiating the steep descent down the pass.

**Sir Lowry's Pass:** 1664 ox wagons only. Pass built in 1828 was named after Sir Galbraith Lowry Cole, Governor of the Cape at the time. Today's modern, cantilevered four-lane highway is a far cry from the original pass, which was steep and dangerous.