

Three Parks and Spring flowers: 2021

Good company on a journey makes the way seem the shorter - Izaak Walton

Welcome to the adventure that covers three national parks and the spring flower areas along the West of the Cape. Our route covers areas in the Western Cape and Northern Cape and will cover some 2800 km. Although there are some gravel roads, none are difficult to manage and do not require high clearance etc. The times indicated do not include stops.

Most of the population of the towns along our route are coloured and Afrikaans is the language most spoken.

Depending on rainfall it may be possible to see flowers from Pofadder onwards. Much of the flower section is north to south, which is the best way to see the flowers facing the sun.

Day 1 Sunday 22 August: Home – Karoo National Park -467 km, 5h 15min

We travel separately and meet at 10h00 at the Veldskoen Farm Stall at De Doorns, have lunch at Matjiesfontein, and proceed to the Karoo National Park.

Home (Constantia) to Veldskoen Farm Stall, De Doorns: 152 km, 2h. The Veldskoen is on the left a few km beyond the settlements at De Doorns. Please order and pay for your refreshments and do not wait for others to arrive.

Leave Veldskoen by 11h00 for lunch at Matjiesfontein Coffee Shop for: 95 km, 1h 10min. Matjiesfontein to Karoo National Park: 223 km, 2h 40min

Du Toits Kloof Pass (1949) and Huguenot Tunnel (1988) – beyond Paarl. The 4km tunnel reduces the distance of the old pass by 11km. Du Toit was the first farmer here in 1692.

Hex River Poort – provides entry to the Hex River Valley. Hex is a translation from Khoi meaning witch.

Hex River Pass – the exit of 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

Laingsburg 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.

Day 2 Sunday 22 & Monday 23 August: Karoo National Park

Two nights and a day at the park.

<https://www.sanparks.org/parks/karoo/tourism/activities.php>

Day 3 Tuesday 24 August: Karoo Park – Mokala National Park 452 km, 4h 55min

We leave the Karoo Park at 08h30, fuel top-up at Beaufort West, lunch at Britstown, fuel top-up at Hopetown (Oranjerus garage) and aim for early arrival at the Mokala National Park.

Karoo Park to Transkaroo Country Lodge, 13 Market Street, Britstown 245 km, 2h 30min.

Britstown to Mokala National Park 207 km, 2h 25min.

Britstown

Britstown is a small farming town in the middle of the Karoo, named after Hans Brits, who settled there after accompanying David Livingstone into the interior. It is located halfway between Johannesburg and Cape Town on the Kimberley route. In 1877 a community centre and church were built on Brits' farm.

Day 4 Tuesday 24 & Wednesday 25 August Mokala National Park

<https://www.sanparks.org/parks/mokala/tourism/activities.php>

Two nights and a day at the park. Guide game viewer drive 6-9 am Wednesday 25th

Day 5 Thursday 26 August: Mokala Park – Augrabies National Park 536 km, 6h 20min

As this is a long day's drive we start early (7am) from the park for breakfast at 09h30 at Griekwastad, lunch at Upington, fuel top-up (66 Scott Street), and on to the Augrabies National Park.

Mokala Park to Griekwastad, Proviand Restaurant 162km, 2h 15min

Griekwastad to Upington, Orange River Cellars Bistro 254 km, 2h 25min

Upington to Augrabies National Park 120 km, 1h 40min

Griekwastad

Griekwastad was the first town to be established in the country north of the Orange River. It was established about 1805 by the London Missionary Society as a station among the Griqua. On their way to Kuruman Dr Robert Moffat and his wife Mary, stayed at Griquatown when their daughter Mary (later Mrs David Livingstone) was born. Griekwastad is nowadays best known for the semi-precious stones found there, particularly tigers' eye and jasper, and sheep farming, with dorpers – a South African meat sheep breed.

Upington

Upington, originating from a mission station, was founded in 1873. Originally called Olijvenhoutsdrif it was later renamed after Sir Thomas Upington, Attorney-General and then Prime Minister of the Cape. The landscape is arid, but irrigation has enabled the cultivation of export-quality grapes, raisins, and wines. The Kalahari Orange Museum, housed in the mission station, is also the home of the donkey statue which recognises the important contribution the animal made to the development of the region.

The Orange River Wine Cellars, where we have our lunch, is the largest in the country and the second largest in the world.

Duiwelsnek Pass – on the outskirts of Kakamas as we enter. Depending on our timing we could stop briefly at the quirky Die Pink Padstal at Kakamas.

Day 6 Thursday 26 & Friday 27 August: Augrabies National Park

<https://www.sanparks.org/parks/augrabies/>

Two nights and a day at the park.

Day 7 Saturday 28 August: Augrabies Park – Okiep 330 km, 3h 30min

We leave Augrabies Park at 08h00 for Pella to see the cathedral and for tea and scones. We stay over at the Okiep Country Hotel where we have lunch, dinner, and breakfast.

Augrabies to Pella 174 km, 1h 55min.

Pella – Okiep, Country Hotel 156 km, 1h 35min. Fuel top-up.

Mining history tour 17h00

We may visit the Goegap Nature Reserve, which is situated some 10 minutes from Springbok.

Pofadder may be named after Klaas Pofadder, a Koranna (Kopi-Koi) Captain or after the puffadder snake. Originally a mission station in 1875, the main activity is farming with sheep and goats.

Pella

Pella is an oasis in Namaqua originally used by the San people. In 1776 a South African Dutch farmer settled there. Missionaries moved there in 1814 and founded the mission station, renaming it Pella, after the ancient town in Macedonia that became a refuge for persecuted Christians from the Romans. Periodically Pella was occupied and abandoned with the London Missionary Society permanently abandoning it due to drought in 1872.

In 1878 a Roman Catholic missionary settled in Pella, but he returned to France because of the intense heat and deprivation. Father JM Simon volunteered to make a fresh start at Pella and arriving in 1882 made friends with the San.

Other colleagues came and returned until the arrival of Brother Leo Wolf in 1885. Simon and Wolf served the community at Pella for more than 50 years. They established gardens and began to build a church, which they designed from a picture in an encyclopaedia. The building took seven years to complete and they learned the trade as they built the church, even forging the ironwork - only the altar was imported. Today Pella is an impoverished community with most of its people unemployed.

Situated 32 km to the West by road is Klein Pella Date Farm which is the largest date farm in the Southern Hemisphere.

Aggeneys

Aggeneys is a mining town established in 1976 on a farm of that name. The hills, mountains and inselbergs have some of the most diverse and complex geology in Southern Africa. Rich concentrations of zinc, copper, lead, and silver are mined in the region.

Okiep

See the link below for some of the fascinating history and geology of Okiep. In the 1870's it was ranked as the richest copper mine in the world. During the Anglo-Boer war, Okiep was besieged for 30 days by Jan Smuts' forces.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/287922000_History_of_the_Okiep_copper_district_Namaqualand_Northern_Cape_Province_South_Africa

Day 8 Sunday 29 August: Okiep – Calvinia 389 km, 4h 05min

We leave at 09h00 for lunch at Nuwerus and on to Calvinia.

Okiep to Bakinumpelis, Nuwerus 202 km, 2h 05min (Bakinumpelis is the West Coast spelling of Buckingham Palace)

Nuwerus to Calvinia 187 km, 2h

Springbok

Springbok is the largest town in the Namaqualand area of the Northern Cape. Established in 1852 for copper mining it is the administrative and business hub of the copper mining area. The main activities nowadays are tourism, mining, commerce, and farming.

nuwerus

Nuwerus owes its name to the days when the post was delivered by horse and cart. It was the stopping point for the horses that needed rest on the way from Vanrhynsdorp to Garies. The Dutch Reformed Church in the town looks as if it belongs in a bigger town. It was designed by the famous South African architect, Gerard Moerdijk, whose best known work is the Voortrekker Monument.

Burke's Pass – 24 km from Springbok (new pass 1995). Named after Jonathan Burke, who built the original pass. The Burkes farmed near Kamieskroon at the time when Lord Charles Somerset was governor at the Cape.

Darter's Poort – 14 km south of Kamieskroon – named after a British sharpshooter, Lt Charles Darter, who was ambushed and killed near the poort in 1902 right at the end of the Anglo-Boer War.

Brakdam se Hoogte Pass – between Kamieskroon and Garies

Garieshoogte Pass – just north of Garies, which is situated at the foot of the Kamiesberg

Vanrhyns Pass – between Vanrhynsdorp and Nieuwoudtville. One of the top passes in the Cape. Originally built by Thomas Bain it is named after Petrus Benjamin Van Rhyn, a clergyman, politician, and member of parliament in the old mission settlement of Troe-Troe, which was renamed Vanrhynsdorp in 1881.

Day 9 Sunday 29 & Monday 30 August: Calvinia - two nights and a day at the Calvinia

Country Hotel. We have dinner at the hotel. After breakfast we visit the Akkerdam Nature Reserve situated just outside the town, and after lunch we visit the museum in the old Synagogue. We have dinner 18h30 at Die Blou Nartjie. Fuel top-up (32 Hoop Street)

Calvinia

Calvinia is a regional town in the Hantam Local Municipality of the Great Karoo. The Khoisan were the earliest known to have lived in the area. White farmers and their

livestock moved there in the 1750's. In 1847 a Dutch Reformed Church congregation was founded for the Hantam Region and the first minister, NJ Hofmeyr, proposed that the church be named after Jean Calvin, the French religious reformer. In 1851 the town was named Calvinia.

Day 10 Tuesday 31 August: Calvinia – home 394 km, 4h 45min

We leave at 10h00 for Traveller's Rest where we have lunch at 12h00 at the Khoisan Kitchen (Traveller's Rest), and a coffee/cake and comfort stop at Moorreesburg before the last lap home!

Calvinia to Travellers Rest 119 km, 1h 30

Travellers Rest to Le Must Eatery, Moorreesburg 163 km, 1h 55min

Moorreesburg to home 112 km, 1h 20min

Botterkloof Pass – named after Botterbome (succulents) that grow in the kloof.

Klipfonteinrant Pass – just north of the Biedouw Valley/Wupperthal turn-off.

Pakhuis Pass – originally built by Thomas Bain. One of the top 20 passes in South Africa in terms of its length (26.4 km) and height gained (824 m). Louis Leipoldt's grave is one of the gravesites.

Piekernierskloof Pass (pikeman's ravine) – originally built by Thomas Bain in the mid 1800's, and rebuilt in 1958, through the neck of the Olifantsrivier mountains that separate the Swartland from the mineral-rich north. In 1675 a Khoi chief, Gonoma, attacked the Khoi allies of the Dutch, who sent pikemen and musketeers to avenge the attack. Gonoma retreated through what is now known as Piekernierskloof.