



» YEAR IN THE WILD

Going wild – and mild – in the Western Cape

With Scott Ramsay

As part of his year-long expedition to 31 nature reserves in SA, photojournalist Scott Ramsay travelled to the Cederberg and discovered some of the best driving routes in the Western Cape. He also visited the milder Table Mountain Park



The Cederberg Wilderness Area, about three hours north of Cape Town, is a spectacular mountainous region of 162 000ha.

It is one of the best areas in the country for hiking, climbing and exploring in your 4x4.

This is a unique area for many reasons. It's one of the largest protected areas of fynbos in the Western Cape, and forms a significant part of the World Heritage Site devoted to this biome's protection. Rare flowers, such as the snow protea, are found only in the Cederberg.

It's also a protected zone for another important biome – the Succulent Karoo, which is the world's most diverse arid floral system.

The Cederberg is home to a significant number of Cape leopards, which are smaller than their northern cousins and thrive in the low-nutrition ecosystem. But you'll be lucky to see one of these secretive cats. More easily spotted are the Verreaux's eagles, soaring overhead.

Once you've hiked to the top of the mountains, you may be rewarded with the sight of a majestic cedar tree, which is now endangered and formally protected. For decades in colonial times, these trees were harvested by foresters to meet the demand for timber.

Then there's the rock art, which is some of the best – and most prolific – in the world. In fact, some experts believe the Cederberg has more rock art per square kilometre than anywhere else. The most easily accessible site is the Stadsaal Caves.

Finally, it's a superb place for hiking and walking, and enjoying the spectacular rock formations, such as the Maltese Cross and the huge Wolfberg Arch. You can cool off by swimming in the clear streams, which provide sanctuary for several fish species. Endemic to the area are the Clanwilliam yellow fish, the rock catlet and the fiery redfin.

You can also visit the old mission villages of Wupperthal and Heuningvlei, which retain much of their original charm. And don't miss the highest vineyards in SA at the award-winning Cederberg Wines.



Far left: The stunning Wolfberg Cracks. Insert, left: Taking a picture of the oddly-shaped Maltese Cross. Left: The Uitkyk Pass is one of the best drives in the Cederberg. Insert, below: "Everlasting" flowers growing in the Cederberg.

Best drives in the Cederberg

The gravel roads in the Cederberg pass through some of the country's most spectacular mountain scenery. But be sure to lower your tyre pressures, as many of the roads are badly corrugated, and the winter rains tend to create sizeable ditches!

There are several excellent scenic routes. The most dramatic is the drive from Algeria to the top of Uitkyk Pass. As its name suggests, the pass offers brilliant views down the valley, north towards Clanwilliam.

Once you're at the top, carry on driving towards Matjiesrivier, along the escarpment. This is where the wilderness area is most impressive, and where you're most likely to see wildlife. The 4x4 track from Matjiesrivier to Wupperthal is perhaps the most interesting route, winding its way along the eastern edge of the main Cederberg range. It's not particularly challenging, and even 4x2 bakkies should be fine on this track.

From Wupperthal, drive over the lovely Pakhuis Pass to Clanwilliam, and then back to Algeria.

The road from Matjiesrivier south to Ceres is spectacular, and so is the farm road from Algeria to Clanwilliam via Garskraal village and Jamaka organic farm.

Things to do in Cederberg Wilderness Area

- The Maltese Cross – a spectacular rock formation with great views of Sneeberg.
- The Wolfberg Cracks and Wolfberg Arch. The "cracks" are en route to the huge arch. They make for an exciting – if somewhat claustrophobic – experience!
- The Stadsaal caves – an array of rock art, easily reached.
- The Cederberg Heritage Route. This community-run donkey cart trail starts at the Pakhuis Pass in the north and runs to the village of Heuningvlei. Call 027-482-2444 for more information.
- Overnighting on the mountains. The Cederberg is all about hiking and experiencing the wilderness. Do an overnight hike, and sleep under the stars.
- The villages of Wupperthal and Heuningvlei. A visit to these historical former mission stations in the east of the Cederberg is a must.
- Tasting wine at Cederberg Wine Cellar. Although the cellar is just outside the wilderness area, it makes for a nice break from all the hiking!
- The view from the top of Uitkyk Pass. This is one of the finest drives in the Cederberg, and is close to Algeria.
- The observatory at Dwarsrivier. Every Saturday evening at eight o'clock, depending on the weather, there is an astronomy lecture and show.

Cederberg contacts

Central Reservations: Tel – 021-659-3500; bookings@capenature.co.za, www.capenature.co.za.

Local Reserve Contacts: Tel – 022-931-2088, Cederberg@cnc.org.za

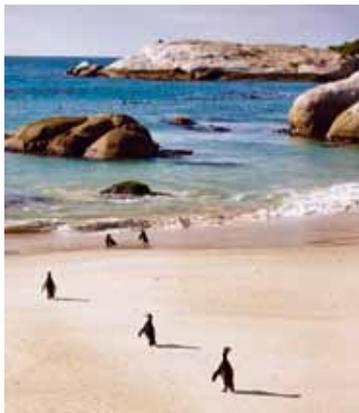
Cape Leopard Trust: www.capeleopard.org.za

GPS: S 32 22.460, E 19 03.424 (Algeria - main Cape Nature office in Cederberg)

The expert opinion

Reserve manager Patrick Lane says: "Even though the word 'wilderness' in the South African context denotes a different experience, the CapeNature Wilderness Area of the Cederberg, while often surrounded by farmlands or communities, is truly pristine and natural. The mountain catchment areas have been like this for millenia. They are absolutely untouched. After a while, the Cederberg gets deep into your bones."





Above: The view down on Hout Bay from the top of Silvermine. Left: Penguins at Boulders Beach. Below: The Overseers Cottage on top of Table Mountain is a fantastically memorable place to stay.



Table Mountain National Park

There can't be many people in the world who haven't heard of Table Mountain, or seen a photograph of this iconic landmark, towering over the beautiful city of Cape Town. Its table-top shape can be seen from more than 100km away on a clear day, and almost every visitor wants to ride the cable car to the top (about 1 000m above sea level) for the stupendous, panoramic views. The mountain defines the city in many ways. Historically, it was home to the KhoiSan people for thousands of years. Had it not been for its perennial streams, the first colonial visitors would probably have settled 150km north at Saldanha Bay (near West Coast National Park), which has a safer natural harbour than Table Bay, but lacks fresh water. Ecologically, the mountain is home to more than 2000 plant species, many of them found nowhere else in the world. Table Mountain National Park incorporates the adjoining mountain ranges and their natural habitat, covering a vast area of almost 1000 square kilometres. It includes several marine protected areas along the shorelines of the peninsula.

Top five things to do in Table Mountain National Park

- Visit Cape Point in the Cape of Good Hope section of the park, and see perhaps the most dramatic views on the peninsula.
- Ride the Table Mountain aerial cableway – a quintessential experience that every tourist has to do, at least once.
- Sleep on the mountain in the ecologically friendly yet comfortable Table Mountain Tented Camps. The tents are regarded as world-class in ingenuity and design.
- Stroll along Noordhoek Beach – A 6km-long, pristine, white-as-snow beach that can be idyllic if the wind isn't blowing. It offers the most romantic sunset on the peninsula.
- Delight in the penguins at Boulders, Simonstown – one of SA's most visited destinations.

Contacts

Central reservations: Tel 012-428-9111, reservations@sanparks.org, www.sanparks.org
 Local contacts: Tel 021-701-8692, tablemountain@sanparks.org, www.tmnp.co.za
 Table Mountain Aerial Cableway: Tel 021-424-8181, www.tablemountain.net

Making Year in the Wild possible

My Year in the Wild is sponsored by **Total, Ford, Evosat, Frontrunner, EeziAwn, Goodyear, National Luna Fridges, Escape Gear, Safari Centre Cape Town, Vodacom, Conqueror Trailers, Digicape, Lacie.**

Total is helping me cover some of my fuel bills. Without these funds, Year in the Wild wouldn't be possible, as I am driving several thousand kilometres every month. **Total** has been actively involved in environmental and conservation initiatives for more than 50 years, including Keep Kruger Clean and Save the Rhino. Also, since 2005, **Total SA** has donated R7,5 million to My Acre of Africa, a fund-raising project in conjunction with South African National Parks. These funds are used for a variety of projects including anti-poaching, endangered species protection, community projects and wildlife translocation. **Total** has a long association with SANParks and has recently been awarded the tender to supply fuel to the parks for the next ten years. **Total** also supplies fuel to Ezemvelo KwaZulu Natal Wildlife, whose parks I will be visiting soon. **Ford** has provided me with an Everest 4x4 for the trip. Before I got to the Cederberg, I'd had it easy on the tar roads in West Coast and Table Mountain parks. The Cederberg was my first taste of challenging road conditions – the roads were corrugated by the heavy winter rains. In the Cederberg, I spent some time with Quinton Martins from the Cape Leopard Trust, and he told me how his vehicles take a hammering. "The Cederberg eats vehicles," was Quinton's assessment. The **Ford's** suspension isn't really designed for hardcore 4x4ing. It's quite soft, but the key to driving in the Cederberg was to deflate the tyres to 1,8 bar. Then the ride became very comfortable. I also found that by not going too slowly, I managed to get a smoother ride...around 50km/h seemed to be a good speed – as long as there were no seriously rutted areas! **Evosat** is a satellite communications company, based in Cape Town, with an extensive network throughout Africa. They have loaned me a wonderful little device called a BGAN. It's the size of a small laptop, and allows internet access at about 100 kilobytes per second, no matter where I am in the wilderness. It's a crucial part of my equipment, as I am often in areas where there is no cellphone reception. Without **Evosat** and the BGAN unit, I wouldn't be able to upload my photos and blogs. The technology is quite amazing – I simply turn the BGAN on, point it towards the sky in a north-easterly direction, and it communicates with a satellite more than 30 000km away!

For new blogs and photos from my Year in the Wild, as well as information on my sponsors, go to www.yearinthewild.com and www.facebook.com/yearinthewild