

TCSA – Whale Trail, 28 July to 2 August 2011

Led by Anthony and Mary

Participants: Diana, Sarah, Adrian, Edwina, Lidia, Carol, Jamie, Robin, Lynette, Geoff

This was one of the best trails I have done. We had perfect weather, beautiful fynbos, spectacular sea and mountain views, many whales and very good company.



Day one: After a comfortable overnight stay at the Potberg hut we set off up the Potberg on our first day. The earth was damp from the recent rains and the proteas were in full bloom. The views over the Breede River valley made the steep incline worthwhile. We had some close encounters with the Potberg vultures soaring on the updrafts. The high point gave us wonderful views from Swellendam to the Breede River mouth and to the sea at Koppie Alleen. We followed the mountain ridge and descended to the hut at Cupidoskraal after a 15km hike. All of the huts are well appointed with hot showers, gas stoves, utensils and comfortable beds. We had a braai in the boma. Our food and clothes were portered

Day two: This was similar to day one. We had to ascend to the mountain ridge which was not as high as yesterday but varied and beautiful. We had views over the Breede River and the De Hoop nature area. We descended from the acidic sandstone area into the alkaline limestone area which prevailed for the rest of the trail. There was a marked difference in the vegetation. After passing a waterfall we had to negotiate a steep decline to a beautiful bay which contained “Noetsie”, our overnight huts and boma after another 15km hike. Noetsie has a perfect position with raging seas, a lake and waterfall and wonderful mountains. The rest of the trail is along the coast. Robin and Jamie soon prepared a fire for our braai and around which we sat late into the evening. Anthony surprised us with his singing voice and repertoire of songs. (definitely no rugby songs!)



Day three: This is a short day but long on features. We climbed out to the cliff top and hiked past deep caves and clefts into the limestone. There was no need to rush as the coastal views were awe inspiring and we were treated to the antics of many whales. We observed several whales breaching. The weather was perfect. We climbed down the cliff to Stilgat where there is a very deep cave and pools for swimming. Anthony was the only one to do a Lewis Pugh and swim in the cold water. After Stilgat we were treated to some spectacular waves crashing into the rocks. After about 8km and a short beach walk we reached Hamerkop, our overnight house with lovely sea views. We did a bit of whale watching from the balcony

Day four: The day started with a long beach walk from Hamerkop. We were lucky that it was low tide and we had firm sand to traverse. We saw many sea birds and Black Oyster Catchers. It was a lovely beach walk. We passed Lekkerwater which is a government owned guest house in a beautiful area. It was occupied at the time. We then had to negotiate flat areas of sea weed covered limestone which can only be done at low tide. We left the beach and hiked along the ridge until we reached Vaalkrans which is the last hut. The hiked distance was 10.5km. Vaalkrans is built over a large cave which penetrates deep into the limestone. Its position could not be bettered with great views and a thundering sea. We spent the rest of the afternoon just chilling out and reading, watching the sea and whales and relaxing. What a privilege to partake in such beauty



Day five: This was a fairly short walk of 7km. We walked above the sea and were treated to unusual rock formations and the usual whales. We reached Koppie Alleen feeling invigorated and satisfied. It was a pity that it had to end. The shuttle bus was spot on time at 12 noon and took us back to Potberg where we showered and packed for home.

We all had a leisurely 2 ½ hour lunch at the Napier Farm Stall on the way home. The food was delicious and good value and we seemed reluctant to return to civilisation.

A vote of thanks to Anthony and Mary for excellent organisation and arrangements and to my fellow hikers for the friendly company

Geoff Tinker