

# SWARTBERG NATURE RESERVE

This is a World Heritage Site



Swartberg Nature Reserve lies between the Great Karoo and Klein Karoo, forming a narrow but long stretch of 121 000ha. The reserve was declared a World Heritage Site in 2004. It is bordered by Gamkapoort Nature Reserve immediately to the north (8 000ha) and Towerkop Nature Reserve immediately to the west (51 000ha). These two reserves are not open to the public but are managed in conjunction with Swartberg. The entire conservation area - a massive 180 000ha - is critical to the management of mountain catchments and water yields in the region. The nearest towns to the Swartberg Pass are Oudtshoorn (40km), De Rust (55km) and Prince Albert (5km).

## History

Numerous rock paintings and artefacts found in caves all over the reserve, show that the area was frequented by San people for many centuries. European farmers arrived in the 1700s, establishing small settlements and building roads, including three historic routes connecting the Great and Klein Karoo: Toorwaterpoort railway, Meiringspoort road, and the untarred Swartberg Pass, built by Thomas Bain, which takes vehicles over the Swartberg mountains and reaches a height of 1585m above sea-level. Gamkaskloof (also known as Die Hel), was first inhabited by farmers in 1830 and accessible only by foot until 1962 when a road was finally built, winding from the Swartberg Pass down into the valley. Gamkaskloof is a Cultural Historical Site.

## Climate and geology

Climates are extreme here. Very cold winters bring snow to the mountains and temperatures well below zero, while summers can be uncomfortably hot with temperatures reaching 40°C and higher. Rain occurs throughout the year, peaking in early winter and spring, with thundershowers in the summer months.

The Swartberg mountains are part of the Cape fold mountain range, with geological formations common to the Table Mountain group and, to a lesser



## Gamkaskloof (Die Hel) A Cultural Historical Site

The remote and isolated Gamkaskloof valley has a rich ecological, archaeological and cultural history and is a must to visit! As well as being part of the World Heritage Site, it was declared a Cultural Historical Site and deserves special care to ensure it is preserved for future generations. It offers camping and self-catering accommodation in eleven restored historical cottages sleeping between two and eight people. Of these, Stappies Cordier cottage is fully equipped for people with disabilities. There are ten camp sites (maximum 6 people per site) and a bushcamp (sleeping up to 12 people), all with hot showers and braai facilities. Towels are provided in all the cottages, but visitors staying at the campsite or bush camp need to bring their own towels.

About 90km from Oudtshoorn and 60km from Prince Albert, Gamkaskloof is only accessible from the Swartberg Pass via the Otto du Plessis road. This road is inaccessible to caravans and there are no shops or fuel stations along the way. Visitors need to bring sufficient food stocks for their stay.

Visitors to Gamkaskloof can enjoy picnicking and angling at the Gamka River with permission from Reserve Management. Permits for angling in the Western Cape (freshwater and



CapeNature

[www.capenature.co.za](http://www.capenature.co.za)

### DISCLAIMER OF LIABILITY

All persons entering this conservation area and using its facilities, do so entirely at their own risk. The Western Cape Nature Conservation Board and/or its employees and/or agents and/or its successors in title shall not be liable for any damage, loss, theft, injury, accident or death suffered by any person, howsoever caused.

Right of Admission Reserved.

### ENQUIRIES

Tel: (044) 203 6300  
[eswanepoel@capenature.co.za](mailto:eswanepoel@capenature.co.za)

### RESERVATIONS

Tel: 021 483 0190

[www.capenature.co.za](http://www.capenature.co.za)



dams) are available at the reserve office and are valid for one year. There

are two hiking trails – the 6,3km (3 hours on average) Grootkloof interpretation trail and a 1,4km trail leading to Koningsgat. Historical artefacts such as the antique Norwegian mill can also be explored. The use of quadbikes is prohibited but motorcycles are allowed with prior permission (contact **Nicolette Mouries** on (044) 203 6324 or alternatively [nmouries@capenature.co.za](mailto:nmouries@capenature.co.za)).



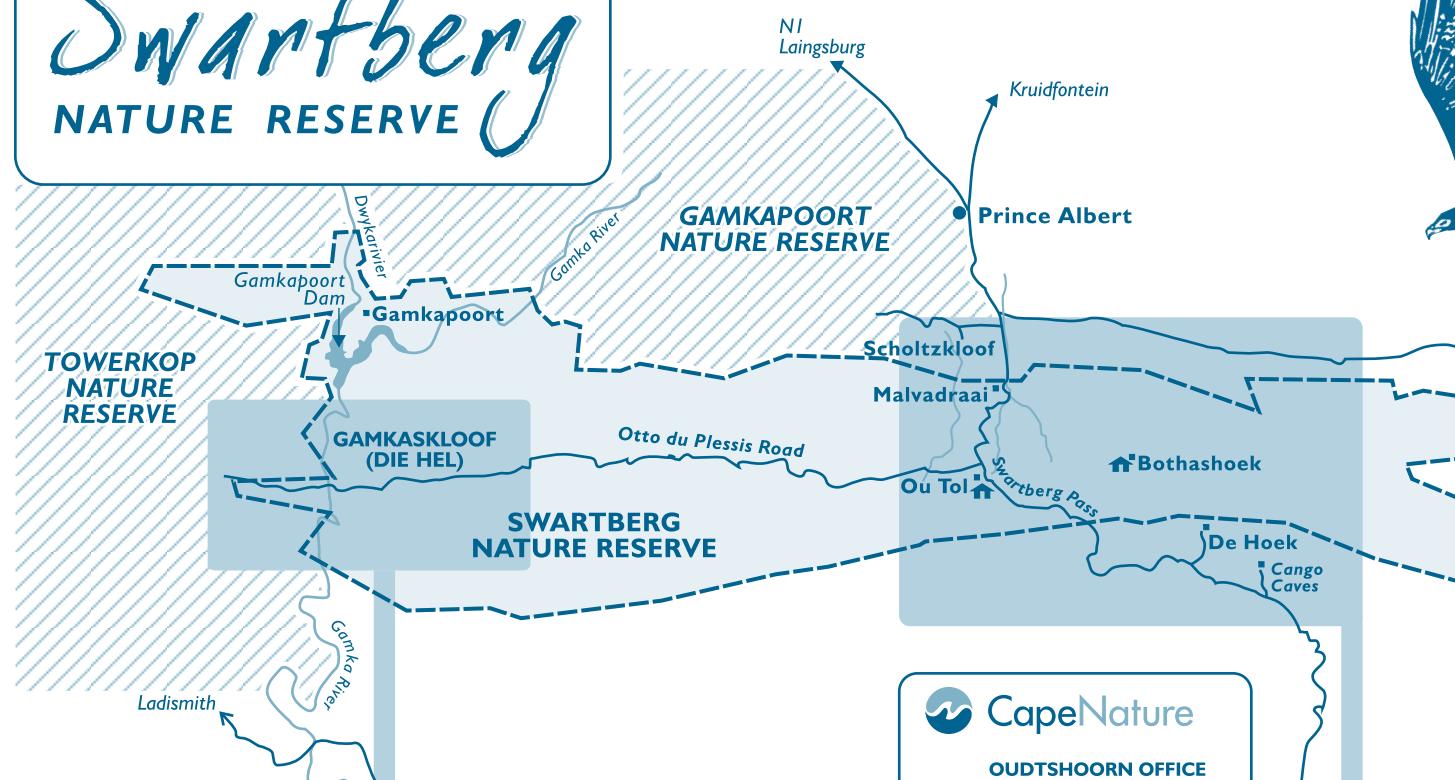
Before the road was built into the Gamkaskloof valley in 1962, a donkey trail over the Swartberg Mountains from Calitzdorp to "Die Hel" was the only commercial lifeline with the outside world.

Hikers – accompanied by donkeys and guides – can now enjoy this heritage trail and hike the original route in the manner of the pioneers of yesteryear. The 25km Donkey Trail starts on the farm "Living Waters" in Groenvoete near Calitzdorp and takes three nights and four days with a maximum of eight people walking at any time. Guests' luggage is portered and all meals are included.

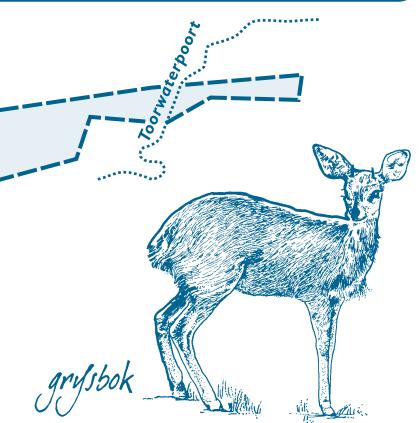
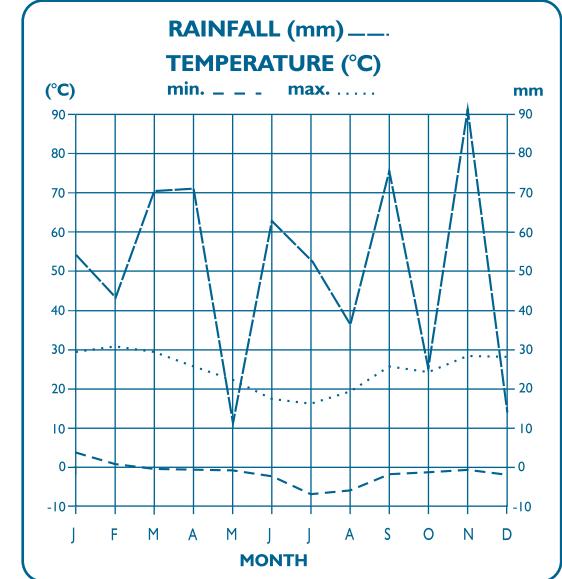
For bookings contact **Erika Calitz** 0836289394 or [info@donkeytrail.com](mailto:info@donkeytrail.com) or visit [www.donkeytrail.com](http://www.donkeytrail.com)



# *Swartberg* NATURE RESERVE



## SCALE



# Swartberg Hiking Trail

