

# ROBBERG Nature Reserve and Marine Protected Area

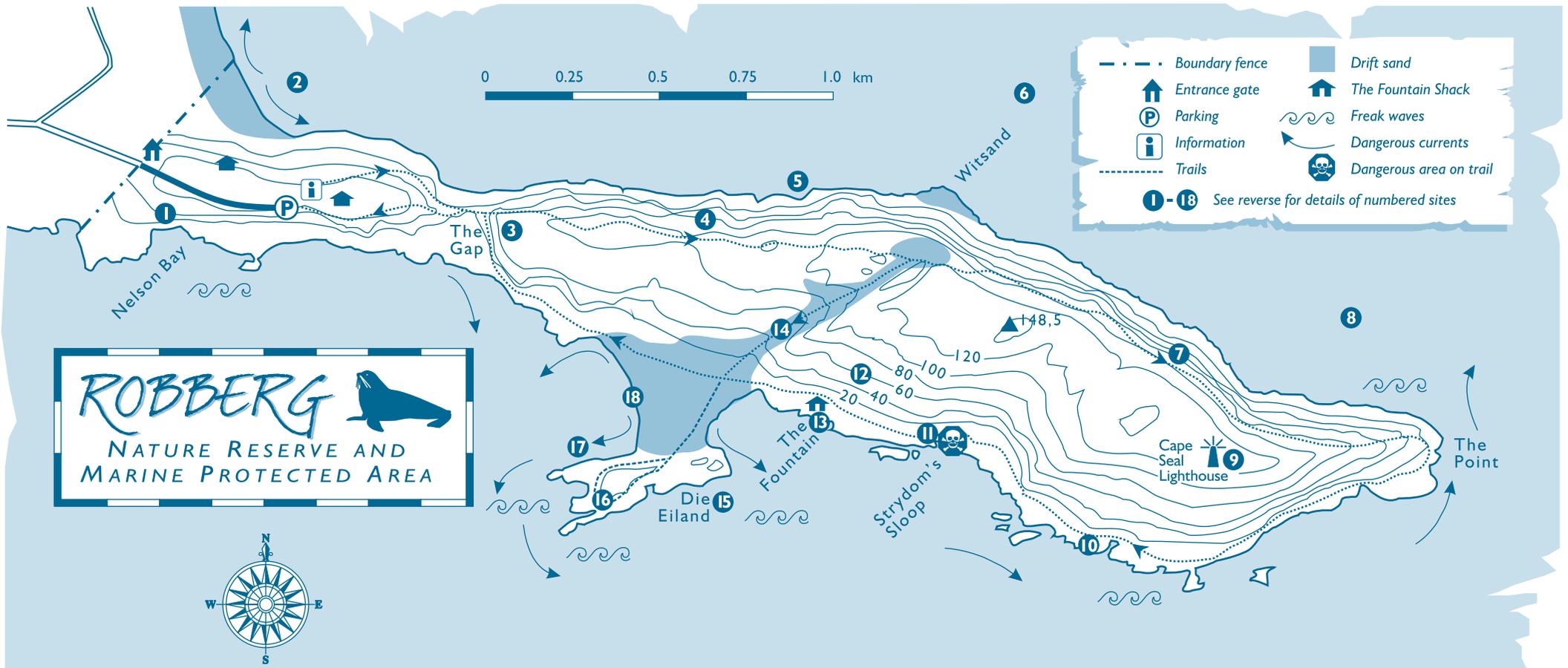
*The Robberg Peninsula is a national monument, nature reserve and marine protected area that lies about 8km south of Plettenberg Bay - a prestigious coastal resort on South Africa's famous Garden Route. The ecology of the Robberg Peninsula is similar to that of other rocky headlands on this coastline and it presents a fine example of how plants and animals adapt to the interacting influences of land and sea.*

- 1 Life in the Stone Ages: Nelson Bay Cave.** Important Middle and Later Stone Age archeological site. First occupied 120 000 years ago when the sea level dropped. Grasslands stretched beyond the southern horizon during last Ice Age when sea levels were lower. Giant Cape horse, giant buffalo and giant hartebeest used to graze here. They became extinct about 10 000 years ago. There are several other cave and open sites with evidence of Stone Age occupation on the peninsula. There are detailed interpretation facilities at Nelson Bay Cave.
- 2 First recorded European habitation in South Africa.** In 1630, the Sao Gonçalo, a Portuguese vessel, was wrecked here. The survivors camped on the beach for about nine months while they built two small boats. Despite being wrecked again, some managed to reach Portugal. The remains of the Athena, a modern fishing trawler which sank nearby, are still visible.
- 3 First evidence of the 'modern' South African coastline.** Robberg's rocks date back to the early Cretaceous period (130-110 million years ago) and the earliest break-up of Gondwanaland - a prehistoric super continent that split up into latter-day South America, Africa, Antarctica, India and Australia about 120 million years ago. The rocks at Robberg were deposited in the bed of this new African sea.
- 4 Look out for spoor of the Western Cape's smallest antelope, the blue duiker.** Classified rare in the Red Data Book, these shy buck are largely confined to evergreen thicket. At the shoulder, adult males are about as tall as a standard 30cm ruler. They feed on fallen leaves, flowers, fruit and young shoots.
- 5 Listen for the bark of Cape fur seals.** Hundreds of seals gather on the rocks between Kanonkoelgat and Grasnek. Adult bulls can be 2.1 m long and weigh up to 350kg. Competition between fishermen and seals for fish has posed difficult challenges for

South African conservationists - how can their different needs be reconciled? Seal harvesting has been suspended since 1990.

- 6 Keep your eyes skinned for dolphins and whales.** Two species of inshore dolphin (humpback and bottlenose) can often be seen from the Robberg Peninsula. Between May and November, Southern right whales come here from the Antarctic region to calve and mate. Humpback whales – another Antarctic species - also visit these waters. Bryde's whales are year-round residents. Plettenberg Bay was previously one of 16 shore-based whaling stations on the South African coast. South Africa outlawed all whaling in its waters by 1980.
- 7 Montane fynbos adapted to harsh coastal conditions.** Plants here are adapted to 'pruning' by wind-driven salt spray, shallow soils and a steep, well-drained slope.
- 8 Look out for Southern Ocean seabirds.** In winter, particularly during storms, seabirds that breed on Sub-Antarctic islands such as Marion Island may be spotted from Robberg. Recorded sightings include shy albatross, broadbilled prion and Subantarctic skua. White-chinned petrel and sooty shearwater can be expected throughout the year.
- 9 Cape Seal Lighthouse.** At 146m above sea level, this is the highest navigational light on the South African coast. Its solar-powered rotating beam has a range of about 27km. Built in 1950.
- 10 The Rocky shore: life in a spin cycle.** The rocky intertidal zone is divided into five distinct vertical zones. Each is occupied by plants and animals with differing abilities to withstand exposure to air and the heating and drying effects of the sun. Periwinkles occupy the highest zone, which is wetted by the sea at high spring tide only. Moving seawards, the other tidal levels are marked by the presence of barnacles, mussels, limpets and red bait respectively. Seaweeds are common below the neap highwater mark. Best explored during a low spring tide.
- 11 Danger!** Do not take any shortcuts, especially below the path. Keep strictly to the trail.
- 12 Candelabra flowers** ('kandelaarblomme'). These bulbs produce spectacular crimson flowers between February and April.

- 13 Fountain Shack.** A recently renovated timber hut that has been a popular fishing spot since the 1940s. It is now available for overnight hiking and offers basic facilities (sleeps 8).
- 14 Feeding Plettenberg Bay with sand.** The Witsand sand dune is one of seven climbing-falling dunes on the Cape coast. The island traps sand driven ashore from the south-west by wind and currents. Dry sand is then blown upwards for about 80m before sliding into Plettenberg Bay. Alien plants and other pioneer species threaten to 'throttle' this sensitive, disturbed system.
- 15 Reefs: Home to the sex-changing roman.** The submerged rocks surrounding the island offer food and shelter to reef fish. Most of them are slow-growing, long-life species that take several years to reach sexual maturity. Some, like the Roman, change sex as they develop. romans start life as females. They become males when large enough to compete for their own harems. Many females can lose a breeding opportunity if 'their' male is caught. Territorial reef fish that reverse their sexes are therefore very vulnerable in heavily-fished areas.
- 16 Seagull nursery.** The breeding success of kelp gulls has improved greatly since boardwalks were laid to rehabilitate disturbed areas and keep humans out of their nesting area.
- 17 Beware! Rip current.** A strong, seaward-moving current caused when waves are parallel to shore. This is very dangerous for swimmers.
- 18 The sandy inter-tidal zone: nature's incredible cleansing service.** Because of the moving sand, plants are unable to take root on sandy beaches. This means that grazers (plant feeders) are absent. This is why all other beach animals have to rely on imported food to survive. Animals feed either by filtering sea water for plankton and organic particles (sand mussels), scavenging (plough snails) or hunting (the three spot swimming crab). Microscopic organisms living in wet sand also eat and recycle organic material in surf.



**Hours:** 7am-8pm (1 October-30 April)  
8am-6pm (1 May-30 September)

**Hiking:** A choice of three circular routes of increasing difficulty and distance. The round trip via The Point takes about four hours. This route is dangerous at high tide and not recommended for young children. Water, hiking shoes and hats are essential. Be prepared for sudden changes in weather.

**Fishing:** The boundary of the Robberg Marine Protected Area extends one nautical mile (1.852km) seawards around the entire reserve. Only rock and surf angling are allowed within the protected area and a permit from Marine and Coastal Management is required (available at post offices). Bait-collecting, fishing from boats, and spearfishing are prohibited.

**WARNING: Beware of freak waves and strong currents at all times.**

Robberg is a national monument. No littering, pets, hunting, or any activity that disturbs the natural or historical environment are allowed. Fires are allowed only at the demarcated fireplace on the deck.

**Contact details:**

Bookings for The Fountain Shack: 0861 227 362 or go to [www.capenature.co.za](http://www.capenature.co.za)  
Robberg enquiries: (044) 533 2125/85

**Emergencies:**

National Sea Rescue Institute: 082 990 5975  
Metro Rescue Services: (044) 802 2500  
South African Police Services: 10111

