

# Willis's Walkabouts

## 2005 SOUTH AFRICAN SPECIAL

**5-6 Weeks: August-September 2005**

*Update 11 June 2005*

**Changes to the May update are printed in italics. The final page is also new.**

Our first four tours to southern Africa have all been great successes – at least that's what our clients have said. Our fifth trip is underway now. This will be our sixth trip since 2001.

There is no other tour like this on the travel market. Transport during the trip will be primarily by rental cars but may include various forms of public transportation as well and, of course, your own feet while carrying a day or overnight pack. **All overnight walks will be accommodated.** You will not need to carry a tent, or any camping gear other than a sleeping bag and possibly a mat. This means that no pack should ever weigh more than 10 kg. Generally it should weigh less.

### **Why use a Darwin-based firm for a South African tour?**

Although this will be only our fourth commercial trip to South Africa, we do have overseas experience elsewhere. The 1998 edition of the Lonely Planet book, *Trekking in the Patagonian Andes*, listed 11 companies from five countries which offer treks in the region. Nine were listed without comment. One was listed as "recommended", one as "highly recommended." (\*) Willis's Walkabouts was the latter. This trip will be the kind of trip which got us the excellent recommendation in South America.

### **The Itinerary**

The following itinerary is based on flying to South Africa from Australia. People from other countries can meet the group in Durban or at any other point on the itinerary. The proposed starting date is listed in the itinerary at the end of these notes. The exact date may change depending on airfares. Going early allows us to miss some of the peak season crowds as well as giving us the best of the wildflowers for which the Cape region is famous.

**Most of the walks we plan to do must be booked and paid for well in advance.** Fixing an exact date before we have the bookings we need to run the trip would almost certainly mean that we could not do all the walks listed below.

The trip will be divided into several sections, any of which may be done on its own. The following draft itinerary gives a general outline of the places you will visit and hints at others. It is not final and subject to change depending on such things as weather, local political conditions, the interests of the group and which walks are still available when we make the bookings. Although most participants are likely to be from Australia, people from other countries can meet the group in Durban or at any other point on the itinerary.

#### **Section 1: Durban and Imfolozi (7 days)**

To cut out some long drives, we plan to fly to Durban, South Africa's second largest city. We immediately move north to Imfolozi (formerly called Umfolozi, a park noted for its large rhinoceros population). Here we should get our best views of African game animals and we'll do it up close and personal walking with local park guides, with nothing but empty space between us and the animals. (The guides do carry rifles but we've never seen them use one.) We spend four nights and three full days on the walk before returning to Durban to collect anyone joining us and moving south to our next walk. The date had been fixed by the availability of the walk. Fast to Imfolozi, more leisurely on the way back.

**Note.** This walk is run by the park. Our guide will be a paying customer, the same as you.

## **Section 2: To Port Elizabeth via the Amatola Trail (7 days)**

From Durban, we take about three days to make our way south along the coast and then inland to the small city of King William's Town. *Along the way we plan to spend a day or two walking on the Wild Coast.* We spend the night at a B&B run by the family of the man who was one of the most important people involved in the creation of the Amatola Mountain Trail, one of South Africa's finest trails. We plan to do the final three days of the walk which we have been told are the most scenic. (This will be our second hike there.) We pass through a variety of scenery and spend the three nights in huts on the trail. (Two of the huts had hot showers on our 2004 visit.)

Port Elizabeth is South Africa's fourth or fifth largest city. We'll stop in if anyone is joining us at this point, otherwise we'll bypass it and continue on to the Garden Route.

## **Section 3: The Garden Route and More (about 18 days)**

*We had hoped to do the five-day Otter Trail but with a group we would have needed to book almost a year in advance. In its place, we will try to book a three day section of the Tsitsikama Trail plus the nearby, shorter but equally spectacular, coastal Harkerville Trail. This will be the fourth time the guide will have done the Harkerville, one of his personal favourites anywhere in the world. We spend one night in a hut at the beginning of the trail and a second in another hut along the way.*

*If we are unable to book the Tsitsikama, we will try and book a three day section of the Outeniqua Trail instead. Both are inland and both offer spectacular scenery.*

*From the Harkerville Trail, we move to somewhere near the Boosmansbos Wilderness Reserve. A local hiking book makes it sound like one of the best two-day walks in the country. From here we move on to a B&B on an ostrich farm near De Hoop Nature Reserve – friendly people and a great place to stay on our last trip. We were unable to book the five day Whale Trail (another trail that needs to be booked nearly a year in advance at this time of year) so we will spend three nights at the Ostrich Farm and two days doing the same day walks we did in De Hoop in 2004. The coast has changed dramatically so the scenery will be very different to the Harkerville. With luck we will see something like the incredible number of whales we saw last year.*

A half day drive from De Hoop brings us to a place called Bettys Bay where we spend a day doing a walk in the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve. Kogelberg encompasses an incredible botanic wealth: more than 120 known species of Erica as well as countless other species in different genera. Kogelberg has been described as the most floristically species rich place on the planet. We will try to do the walk with one of the local guides I have used in the past. (On our last trip, we were accompanied by the author of a book on the flora of the reserve.) It may only be a day walk, but the main walk is 22 km so it is a long day. If anyone doesn't feel up to it, there is a shorter option which returns to town via the local botanic gardens.

The following day we move north to the start of the Arangieskop Trail. This is only overnight, but it is both rugged and spectacular. A steep climb is rewarded with a night in a mountain hut that has to be experienced to be believed. In September 2004, we arrived in late afternoon snow flurries and were soon settled down by the fireplace. Freezing outside and 22°C inside. The next morning we wandered through an ice crusted wonderland before descending back down to the warmth below. We'll spend the night we finish in a nearby B&B.

**Note.** *If you don't want to bring sleeping mats, I can leave out the Boosmansbos walk and replace it with a visit to the South African Astronomical Observatory and a stay in a B&B specialising in night sky watching. I could also easily add in an extra day in the Cedarberg.*

#### **Section 4: The Cedarberg and the Cape Town area (about 8 days)**

We move north through the town of Worcester where anyone leaving early can catch a bus to Cape Town. The rest of us will move north to one of the most amazing farm stay places I've ever seen. It's a fruit farm with a mountain backdrop and a wonderful short walking trail which takes in a couple of San (bushman) rock art sites as well as giving excellent views over the surrounding countryside. With luck, we may (as I did on my first visit) see a few Klipspringers (a small antelope) along the way. The accommodation is in an old but fully restored farmhouse, possibly the best value for money I've ever encountered in my travels.

From there we move further north into the heart of the Cedarberg, a mountainous area where we find more excellent wildflower displays, rugged rock formations and rock paintings. As there are no huts on the trails, we plan to do several day walks in the area, returning to cabin accommodation overnight. This will save us from the need to carry tents and sleeping mats for the full trip. These walks will include some fairly steep and rugged terrain. They will include the best of those we have done in the past.

*If anyone would like a pair of handmade boots, crafted exactly to fit your feet, we can organise this beforehand and pick them up in the town of Wuppertal. This would have to be organised well in advance.*

Time is running out, so we move on to Cape Town. Table Mountain offers good day walks and, weather permitting, spectacular views, a good way to finish the trip. The Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens offer a final chance to become acquainted with some of the flora we will have seen in the wild earlier in the trip. If time permits, we can go down to the Cape of Good Hope where there are some good day walks (as well as one overnight walk.)

The trip ends when you fly out of Cape Town.

#### **What does it cost?**

South Africa is one of the few countries where the Australian dollar still goes a long way. Our fee was \$1900 plus an extra \$100 for insurance in 2004. This trip will be somewhat shorter, so I will drop the fee to \$1700 plus a proportional share of the public liability insurance per person. (In 2004, the insurance for the one trip cost \$1320. I do not yet have quote for this year.)

Our public liability insurance requires you to have your own travel insurance. It may sound like overkill, but I have heard of a case where the Travel Insurer sued a tour operator for something that happened that they had to cover.

The \$1700 covers the guide, who also acts as organiser and cook, plus the evening meals on the walks and in some Cedarberg cabins between day walks. In addition, you will have to pay your share of all the expenses for food, accommodation, transport, etc. The guide will pay the same fees and fares as everyone else and will keep these as low as reasonable comfort, reliability and availability will allow.

If exchange rates stay similar, our town accommodation should cost anywhere from about A\$20 to A\$50 (US\$10 to US\$25) per night. The relatively low cost of restaurant meals and the high quality of our accommodation have been one of the more pleasant aspects of our previous trips. The prices above were twin share in what would be considered three or four star establishments in Australia.

Based on our recent expenses, a **very rough** estimate of the cost follows. With luck, we'll be able to shave a bit off the total. If the Aussie dollar collapses against the rand, it will cost more. If it gains, it should cost less. We do not expect the whole trip to cost less than \$6000 or more than \$8000. This does not include any souvenir shopping you may do. We should have a more accurate estimate closer to departure.

Return airfare	\$ 2000	Walkabouts fee	\$1700
Liability Insurance	200	Your own travel insurance	300
Breakfasts & lunches	200	Restaurant meals	500
Hire car	1000	Imfolozi guided game walk	600
Other park & camping fees	300	<u>Accommodation</u>	<u>600</u>
		Total	\$7400

## What do you get for the fee?

You get expert advice on the things to bring, the probable weather, etc. You get someone who will handle the mundane details of making the travel arrangements, doing the food shopping for the walks, organising accommodation etc. You get someone who will provide all the group equipment (billies, stoves, etc) and who will cook all the evening meals on the walks allowing you to relax and enjoy yourself. You also get a small, like-minded group of people with whom you can share your experiences and expenses. Hiring a vehicle as part of a group costs far less than hiring it with only two or three.

**Note 1.** Some of what you get for your money is not very visible. Bushwalking in South Africa is restricted. Permits have to be arranged well in advance all trails have strict limits. Some of our walks are in national parks run by a national authority. Some are in provincial parks. Some are in other areas. In 2001, making these bookings took anywhere from ten minutes to three weeks depending on the agency involved. All that paperwork has to be done well in advance or we won't be able to do the walks as planned.

As another example, prior to one of the long walks, you might spend a day relaxing or sightseeing while the guide goes out and hits the supermarkets, then spends an hour (or two or three) doing the final organising for the meals on the walk. If you can't see the value in services like these, you are unlikely to feel that you are getting real value for your fee.

**Note 2.** Prices are subject to change.

**Note 3.** A large majority of those who have taken part in our overseas tours are Australian so all prices are quoted in Australian dollars. We have had several people from other countries take part by making their own travel arrangements to and from the start and finish points.

**Note 4.** All bushwalks are subject to change due to weather conditions. If we get really foul weather at the start of a walk, we may wish to abort it, at least temporarily. If we get really foul weather later on, we may have to cut a route short.

**Note 5.** Most of the walking is on marked trails and most of the time we will be staying in huts. This means that this trip will be somewhat easier than most of our others. There are, however, lots of ups and downs so aerobic fitness and reasonable strength are required.

**Note 6.** As some of the walks have a permitted maximum of eight people, we expect to restrict our group to eight including the guide. Depending on what vehicles are available, we may consider increasing this slightly and running two groups for short sections as we did in 2003. *Vehicles have been a problem for us in the past – it was hard to get small vehicles suitable for four or five people with pack on gravel roads. An eight person minibus worked well on one trip and Toyota Condors on another. We've only managed the same vehicles on two trips so far. The car companies keep changing their offerings. Using two vehicles would allow us to do through walks as well as loops. We've won the last two times but can't guarantee that the same vehicles will be available.*

## What you don't get?

You do not get a guide who will hold your hand and make every decision for you. **You** must be prepared to take on a much greater degree of responsibility than on most other tours. All members of the group, including the guide, are expected to work together in establishing how the group will

function, who will lead on the walks, who will look after the stragglers, etc.

A trip such as this cannot work unless everyone helps out. A few examples may help you understand just how important this is.

Hypothermia could be a potential problem on the mountain walks. A person who becomes hypothermic is unlikely to realise it. In an extreme case, he or she may have to be physically restrained from doing something which a rational person would describe as insane. There is no way that any one person, no matter how experienced, can look after an entire group 100% of the time. No matter how careful the guide may be, there is always a possibility that he will be the one to get injured or otherwise incapacitated.

Accepting the responsibility that goes with a trip like this is part of the experience we offer. It is one of the things that sets our trips apart from the vast majority of "adventure" trips on the market. For those prepared to accept this responsibility, it makes the experience doubly rewarding. Those who are not prepared to accept such responsibility would be better off going on a "normal" tour.

## Is it for you?

**This trip is not for the average tourist.** We can neither control nor predict the weather, only accept it as it comes. If you do not want to take the necessary responsibility and/or you cannot obtain the necessary equipment, it is not for you. Good physical fitness and a good mental attitude are both necessary. If you have never carried a pack on an overnight walk, have never walked off trail, have never camped in cold, windy and wet conditions, it will be harder for you to cope with the likely conditions than for a person who has had the relevant experience. Past experience has shown us that a fit, experienced 70 year old may cope better than a fitter 25 year old who does not have experience in coping with adverse conditions.

## A Final Caution and a suggestion

Do not expect everything to run like clockwork. Such things often fail to happen in South Africa. If you want to get maximum value for your money, you can go off and go sightseeing or simply relax while the guide does the food shopping or tries to organise or reconfirm hiking permits, etc. Or, if you wish, you are welcome to join him or her while (s)he does these things.

There may be occasional days between sections where you will be left to your own devices while the guide slows down and relaxes a bit and catches up on the organising. Based on past experience, things will run more smoothly if the guide does this.

If you would like a better visual picture of what these walks will be like, please have a look at our South Africa web page: [www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/html/africa.htm](http://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/html/africa.htm). There are many photos from previous trips and links to other pages giving more information.

## Conditions

1. A deposit of \$200 is payable on booking. This will be refunded in full if five people have not booked by 7 May. Final payment is due by 4 July.
2. Our cancellation fees are \$200 before 7 May, \$500 before 1 June, \$900 before 1 July and the full \$1700 plus liability insurance fee after that. The different South African authorities with whom we make bookings all have their own cancellation fees. If you cancel after we have made and paid for a booking on your behalf, you will lose whatever is non-refundable as well as our cancellation fee.
3. All participants are responsible for obtaining the necessary passport and visas and must have some form of travel insurance. **We need to see proof of your travel insurance before departure.** We need this because of our own insurance.

*Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.*

Russell Willis

\* Lonely Planet quote is on pages 69 and 70 of the 1998 edition.

## **Too Long? Have I missed something you'd especially like to see?**

Please have a look at the itinerary on the final page and let me know what you think we can leave out or what you think should be added. We can easily add a bit at the beginning or at the end.

**Note 1.** I expect to be away July 2-17. If you have any questions or suggestions, it's best to try and contact me ASAP as I'll be very busy with office work in the meantime. I want to have 95% of the trip organised before I leave for my next bushwalk.

**Note 2.** The itinerary remains a work in progress. The final one should look very much like this but **there is almost no chance that it will run exactly as shown.** I have only made bookings for the Imfolozi walk and the Amatola. I cannot be sure that the other walks will be available on the exact dates shown.

## **2005 SOUTH AFRICAN SPECIAL: Draft Itinerary**

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| 14 Aug    | Rod and Maureen arrive Durban at 8.10 pm.  |
| 15 Aug    | Fly to Durban. Collect vehicle(s). Overnight in town or on the road.   |
| 16 Aug    | Finish drive to Imfolozi. Wilderness trail base camp   |
| 17-19 Aug | Imfolozi Wilderness Trail<br><b>Note.</b> The trail does not begin every day. I have booked the full 8 places. These must be paid for by 18 June to confirm the booking.   |
| 20-21 Aug | Back to Durban to collect anyone joining. Phil Watson arrives in Durban on the night of 20 August.   |
| 22-24 Aug | Collect one person joining us here, then head to King Williams Town. We should be able to spend one or two days doing day walks along the Wild Coast along the way.  |
| 25-27 Aug | We'll do the last 3 days of the Amatola Trail. "Starting at the end of the 3rd day. This is definitely the best part of the whole trail. (If we do the full five days, everything below will be shifted to two days later.)<br>See <a href="http://www.amatola.co.za/trails/amatola-trails.htm">http://www.amatola.co.za/trails/amatola-trails.htm</a> – this has links to other pages about the same area.  |
| 28 Aug    | Drive some more.   |
| 29 Aug    | Drive still more to near Knysna.   |
| 30/8-1/9  | Three day section of the Tsitsikama or Outeniqua Trail. See <a href="http://www.footprint.co.za/Tsitsikamma.htm">http://www.footprint.co.za/Tsitsikamma.htm</a> for information about the Tsitsikama Trail or <a href="http://www.footprint.co.za/outeniqua1.htm">http://www.footprint.co.za/outeniqua1.htm</a> and <a href="http://www.footprint.co.za/outeniqua2.htm">http://www.footprint.co.za/outeniqua2.htm</a> for information about two different three-day sections of the Outeniqua. |
| 2 Sep     | Rest and relaxation, finishing at the start of the Harkerville Trail   |
| 3-4 Sep   | Harkerville Trail.   |
| 5 Sep     | Drive to somewhere near the Boosmansbos Wilderness Reserve.  |
| 6-7 Sep   | Boosmansbos Wilderness Trail. Drive to near De Hoop after walk. Overnight at ostrich farm.   |
| 8-9 Sep   | De Hoop day walks.   |

- 10 Sep Drive to Bettys Bay.
- 11 Sep Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve. Flora walk with a botanic guide. If no one is particularly interested in the fynbos flora, we can leave this out. **If anyone is interested, this is not to be missed.**
- 12 Sep Continue on to Start of Arangieskop trail.
- 13-14 Sep Arangieskop Trail. Overnight in a mountain hut. This was one of the most spectacular walks we did in 2004. Finish in a B&B somewhere.
- 15 Sep Toward the Cedarberg. Drop off in Worcester for those finishing. They bus to Cape Town. For those continuing. Kunje Farmstay and short walk. One of my favourite spots.
- 16 Sep Cape Town people fly out.  
Continue to the start of the Cedarberg.
- 17-18 Sep Cedarberg Cracks and Maltese Cross walks.
- 19 Sep Travellers Rest or other short Cedarberg walk. Possible detour via Wuppertal. We spent two nights there last year. Several long and short walks in the area.
- 20 Sep To Cape Town
- 21 Sep Table Mountain day walk, probably finishing at the Kirstenbosch Botanic Gardens.
- 22 Sep Some fly out.
- 22-23 Sep Cape of Good Hope. Long day walks. Overnight in park cottage.
- 24 Sep Cape Town, sightseeing or Table Mountain walk if the weather was bad on the 21<sup>st</sup>.
- 25 Sep Fly out for home.

**Accommodation and meals** (subject to change)

- 14-15 Aug You pay accom and meals. (total 2)
- 16-19 Aug Accom and meals included in Imfolozi cost.
- 20-24 Aug You pay accom and meals (total 7)
- 25-27 Aug Amatola Trail, WW provides evening meals (*total 3*)
- 28-29 Aug You pay accom and meals (total 9)
- 30-31 Aug Hiking, WW provides meals (*total 5*)
- 1 Sep You pay accom and meals (total 10)
- 2-3 Sep Harkerville at start and on trail, WW provides evening meals (*total 7*)
- 4-5 Sep You pay accom and meals (total 12)
- 6 Sep Boosmansbos Wilderness Trail, WW provides evening meals (*total 8*)
- 7-9 Sep You pay accom and two meals. WW will cook one. (total 14, *WW total 9*)
- 10-11 Sep You pay accom and meals (total 16)
- 12-13 Sep Arangieskop, at start and on walk, WW provides evening meals (*total 11*)
- 14-15 Sep You pay accom and meals (total 18)
- 16-18 Sep You pay accom, WW provides evening meals (*total 13*)
- 19-21 Sep You pay accom and meals (total 21)
- 22 Sep You pay trail accom, WW provides evening meals (*total 14*)
- 23-24 Sep You pay accom and meals (total 23)

I will provide an update on the cost of the accom as soon as it is booked.