

Willis's Walkabouts

First Draft: 2017 South African Great Walks Special

About 7½ weeks: October-November 2017

All our tours to southern Africa have been great successes – at least that’s what our clients have said. We’ve seen a lot, but we want more. Every trip we offer will include at least one walk we haven’t done before.

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

We have now done more than ten trips to South Africa. No one else offers tours like these. 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.

The Itinerary

The following itinerary is based on flying to South Africa from Australia. People from other countries can meet the group in Cape Town 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. We plan to begin the trip in Cape Town and end in Johannesburg.

We have not yet booked any of the walks listed below. The itinerary remains a work in progress.

The trip is divided into several sections, any of which may be done on its own. There is no point in giving exact dates until we are able to make the relevant bookings. We can’t do that until we have enough bookings to run the trip.

Section 1: Capetown Area: approx 8 days

The first several days at the beginning of the trip will be spent in and near Capetown. Table Mountain offers good day walks and, weather permitting, spectacular views, a good way to begin the trip. The Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens offer a chance to become acquainted with some of the flora we will be seeing in a more natural setting later in the trip. See www.sanbi.org/gardens/kirstenbosch for more on the gardens

We have never done any part of the five day Hoerikwaggo Trail. It’s a one way trail which means that, if we do a part, we are probably better off doing a part near Cape Town so that transport is easy to arrange. At this point, we are considering two or three days, from days 3-5 on the SAN parks website. We might do this in the reverse order. For more information see http://www.sanparks.org/parks/table_mountain/ht/default.php

From Cape Town we will drive to the Cape of Good Hope where we will hire the Olifantsbos Cottage for two nights. Everyone on our trips which stayed there thought this was a very special place. The one night isn’t enough so we will spend two nights there as we did in 2010. You can see photos from that trip at

www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.475112561927.259424.205216266927&type=3

For more information about Olifantsbos see http://www.sanparks.org/parks/table_mountain/tourism/availability_dates.php?id=410&resort=39



Olifantsbos sunset, your nearest neighbour is 20 km away

Section 2: The Cedarberg: approx 4 days

From Olifantsbos, we drive north to the Cedarberg. At this point we're looking at driving all the way to Travellers Rest, <http://www.travellersrest.co.za/index.php>, and doing a short walk there. Click on their gallery link to see photos of what we'll be doing.

From there we'd go south to Sanddrif and doing one moderate half day walk and one very long-full day walk. Self catering cabins.

<http://www.cederberg.co.za/sanddrif.html>



Wolfberg Arch, Cedarberg. This is on the long day walk.

Section 3: The Garden Route West: approx 5 days

We met a South African couple on one of our trail walks in 2008 who recommended that we include a walk in the Marloth Nature Reserve, <http://www.capenature.co.za/reserves/marloth-nature-reserve/>, near Swellendam on our next trip. We've had a look at what's available and it looks like a must. The full trail is six days, but there are shorter options. See the Footprint Hiking Club Swellendam page for information.

<http://www.footprint.co.za/swellendam.htm>

Russell wanted to do it on his last trip but wasn't able to book. Recent bushfires have done some damage so we'll aim to do a three or four day option instead of the full trail. It's quite a way from the Cedarberg, so we'll spend most of the first day driving. Most, not all. Along the way we plan to stop at the Karoo Botanic Gardens in



Karoo Botanic Gardens



Black oyster catchers

Worcester. We've been there on two previous trips and enjoyed it both times. For more on the gardens see www.sanbi.org/gardens/karoo-desert.

Not far from Swellendam is the De Hoop Nature Reserve. There are a number of excellent day walks so we'll do one and spend two nights at a wonderful farm where we've stayed on four previous occasions. This is a good area for birding. Among the rarer species we usually see are black oyster catchers and blue cranes.

Section 4: The Garden Route East: approx 8 days



Misty morning on the Outeniqua Trail

It's a long drive from De Hoop to Knysna, our base for this section where we'll do part of the Outeniqua Trail plus the Harkerville Trail, one of the most spectacular coastal trails in South Africa. Walkabouts owner Russell Willis has done the Harkerville four times and would be more than happy to do it again. It's not easy,



Enjoying the view before the final climb on the Harkerville Trail

but it's not as hard as the photos on our Facebook album,

www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10151608565266928.1073741825.205216266927&type=3 make it look. We've had a number of people well into their 70's do the walk.

The Footprint Hiking Club has a good Harkerville page, <http://www.footprint.co.za/harkerville.htm>

Section 5: To the Drakensberg: approx 4 days

Along the way we'll do the Alexandria Trail. This trail offers a good mix of forest and sandy beach. The overnight hut has some truly spectacular views. The weather was less than kind when we did the walk in 2010. Hopefully, we'll be luckier this time. But, even with bad weather, the trail is well worth doing.

For more information on the trail see the Footprint Hiking Club Alexandria Trail page, www.footprint.co.za/alexandria.htm, and/ or the South African National Parks page, https://www.sanparks.org/parks/addo/tourism/activities/alexandria_trail.php



Walking along the beach near the start of the Alexandria Trail.

Section 6: The Drakensberg: approx 5 days

The first four nights will be based at the Sani Pass Lodge. See <http://sanilodge.co.za/>. We will do a day trip into Lesotho (there are a variety of options). The drive to Lesotho is slow but spectacular as shown at the photo at far right. We visit a small village and get a glimpse of what it is like to live in one of the local rondavels. It is, to say the least, a



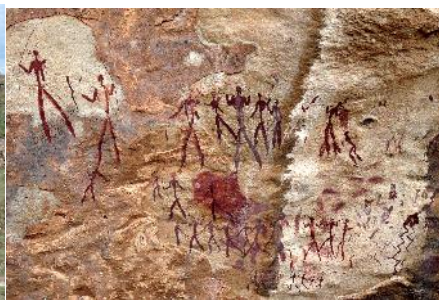
Lesotho rondavel.



The Sani Pass road into Lesotho.



On the trail to Gxalingwa



Rock art near the trail

hard life.

Back at Sani Pass Lodge again, we do the overnight walk to Gxalingwnwa Cave. The walk gives us some great views, a chance for a swim or two if it's warm, visits to some excellent rock art sites and a night in the cave at the top.

For more information, see <http://sanilodge.co.za/DAhikeovernight.htm> – 2nd from top.

The final night on this section will probably be at the Antbear Guesthouse. We've been there three times and are more than happy to go back. It's a little pricey but it's also a nice touch of luxury. See <http://www.antbear.com>.

Section 7: The Battlefields and on to Kruger: approx 2 days

Rorke's Drift stands famous in British history. Not so famous is the disaster the British had as nearby Isandlwana. Visiting a few historical sites added an extra dimension to previous trips so we'll do it again. It's one of the best chances we have of getting a bit of a feel for the local culture. In 2008 and 2010, we included a full day tour with a local history buff. It was so good that we'll try and include it again. Alternatively, we might visit some of the Battlefields from the Boer War or, if people are very interested, we might even do both.

We'll spend two nights at the Penny Farthing B&B and do one of their Battlefields tours. I've done two before and can recommend them. See www.pennyf.co.za



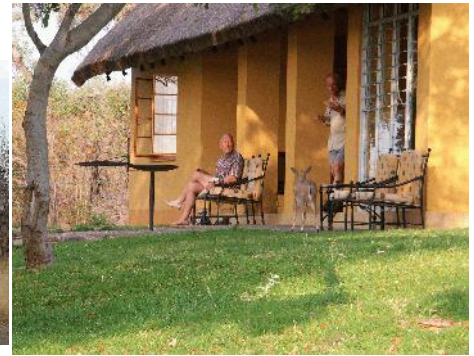
Isandlwana – every pile of stones represents where a small group of British soldiers fell in battle.

Section 8: Kruger: approx 7 days

We will try and book one of the four day Kruger Wilderness Trails, (see www.sanparks.org/parks/kruger/tourism/activities/wilderness/) and combine it with two or three nights in one or two large camps and one or two small ones.



When you are driving in Kruger, the locals have right of way.



Shimuwini accommodation & visitor

We'll definitely try and include Shimuwini, Russell's favourite camp in the park. A short walk from our front door brings us to a bird hide and views out over the river below.

Section 9: Kruger to Johannesburg:



River crossing on the Kingdom Trail

We'll finish with an old favourite, run by Anvie Ventures, the Olifants Gorge Trail (I've already done it four times.) See <http://www.anvieventures.co.za> and click on "Overnight Trails and Backpacking" on the left menu. The first and last nights are spent at a wonderful old farmhouse.

This last hike gives you more good views, a final chance to see African wildlife, comfortable beds and a few river crossings. Sometimes we can do them with dry feet.



Final dinner at the end of the last walk

Sometimes, as at left, it requires a wade.

The Footprint Hiking Club website <http://www.footprint.co.za/kingdom.htm> describes the Olifants Gorge (Kingdom) Trail. From there, we go straight to the Johannesburg airport.

The above should give you an idea of what to expect. We can't be 100% sure which trails we can include until we have confirmed the bookings to run the trip.

What does it cost?

South Africa is one of the few countries where the Australian dollar still goes a long way. Our fee is \$2495 which now covers our liability insurance. Our public liability insurance requires you to have your own travel insurance. It may sound like overkill, but we have heard of a case where the Travel Insurer sued a tour operator for something that happened that they had to cover.

Note. None of the discounts which apply to our Australian trips apply to any of our overseas trips.

The \$2495 covers the guide, who also acts as organiser and cook, plus the evening meals on the walks where we do the catering. 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. 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 \$7000 or more than \$9500. This does not include any souvenir shopping you may do. We should have a more accurate estimate closer to departure.

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. All parks in South Africa charge fees. Most charge more for international visitors. Purchasing a Wild Card will save you money over the course of the trip. It will also get you additional information. The current price is R2210 single or R3455 for a couple. That's about A\$220 or A\$350. For more information see <http://www.sanparks.org/wild/tourism/pricing.php>

Note 2. 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 the past, making these bookings has taken 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 3. Prices are subject to change.

Note 4. 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 5. 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 6. 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 7. 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 several times but can't guarantee that the same vehicles will be available.*

Note 8. This trip will be led by Bruce Swain. Bruce first began working as a Walkabouts guide in 1988. While he has not done this trip before, he is one of our most experienced guides and will have the benefit of all the knowledge we've accumulated since our first visit to South Africa in 1999.

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 don't want to take the time to stop and look at the little things as well as the big ones, this trip isn't for you.

Conditions

1. A deposit of \$200 is payable on booking. This will be refunded in full if five people have not booked by mid February. Final payment is due by 1 June or within a week after we confirm the departure..
2. Our cancellation fees are \$200 before the trip becomes a confirmed departure, \$950 before 1 August and the full \$2495 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 & Bruce Swain

2017 South Africa Day by Day **Draft Itinerary** - First draft

The itinerary which follows is a work in progress. We are working with those who have already booked and will work with anyone else who books to turn this into a trip that will give you memories to treasure for a lifetime.

- Day 1 Arrive Cape Town
- Day 2-3 In Cape Town. One day up Table Mountain and down the other side. If we get good weather on day 2, we'll go up then. If not, we'll try day 3 and go up, good or bad (but bad, only within reason).
- We'll probably book us into Dale Court, a place Russell has stayed every time he's been in Cape Town. Dale Court has twins and singles, R1400 and R1050 per room. Dale Court: www.dalecourt.co.za. If you want something cheaper, we can look
- Day 4-6 One of the Table Mountain overnight walks. Two nights on the trail, 3rd night somewhere in normal accommodation.
- Day 7-8 Collect hire car(s) and drive to the Cape. Accom at Olifantsbos Guest House. Short walks on the way in, longer one the 2nd day.
- Day 9-12 North to the Cedarberg. Selection of day walks. We'll spend at least two nights in some self-catering cabins at a place called Sanddriff.
- Day 13-17 To and in the Marloth Nature Reserve. We might stop at the Karoo Botanic Gardens in Worcester on the way.
- We might stop near Robertson at a very nice B&B called Goedereede where we've stayed twice before. Prices begin at R320 per person for the bed. R70 for breakfast for those who want it. (Russell considers the B&B breakfasts a real highlight.) They may or may not still do dinners. See www.goedereede.co.za/index.html
- Day 18-19 Short drive to the farm stay Die Plaashuis near De Hoop Nature Reserve. Depending on what time we arrive, we may do a short walk that day. Do a long beach walk the 2nd day.
- Day 20 Drive to Knysna.
- Day 21-25 Outeniqua Trail from Millwood to Harkerville. (We might cut this by a day). <http://www.footprint.co.za/outeniqua2.htm>

- Day 26-27 The Harkerville Trail, overnight at Sinclair hut. I've done it four times. It's easier than the photos make it look. Although shorter, the coastal section is even more spectacular than the Otter. See www.footprint.co.za/harkerville.htm
- Drive to Plettenberg Bay at the end of the walk.
- Day 28 To start of Alexandria Trail. Overnight Langebos Huts. See www.footprint.co.za/Alexandria.htm
- Day 29 On Alexandria Trail. Overnight Woody Cape Hut.
- Day 30 Finish Alexandria Trail. Drive to Grahamstown, about 100 km
- Day 31-32 Very long drive to Sani Pass Lodge, Drakensberg. See <http://sanilodge.co.za/>
- Day 33-35 One day trip plus an overnight walk. I did and enjoyed the GXALINGENWA CAVE walk on my last trip. See <http://sanilodge.co.za/DAhikeovernight.htm> – 2nd from top.
- Day 36 To the Antbear Guesthouse with a half day walk somewhere along the way. Russell was there twice and would be more than happy to go back. It's a lovely place, but a bit expensive so we can find an alternative if needed.
- Day 37-38 Leave edge of Drakensberg. Drive to Penny Farthing near Dundee. Museum or two en route. Battlefields tour, booked deposit paid. Overnight at Penny Farthing. See www.pennyf.co.za
- Day 39-40 Penny Farthing toward Kruger.
- Day 41-47 In Kruger. 4 day Wilderness trail plus three nights in camps.
- Day 48 Exit park. Drive toward Johannesburg.
- Day 49 Drive to Slagthoek (a lovely old farmhouse) & start of Kingdom Trail. Shopping en route. Here's the Footprint page for the general trail. www.footprint.co.za/slagthoek.htm
- Day 50-52 To Slagthoek.
- Day 53 Drive to Johannesburg airport & fly out.

Final Note We must emphasise that this is a first draft. Anyone booking this trip needs a degree of flexibility. What we actually do will depend on what we can actually book – and we can't start to book things until we have bookings.