

Willis's Walkabouts 2017 Western Cape, South Africa

Major Update: 5 September

20 October - 17 November 2017

On 9 August, I received confirmation that the Wellington Wine walk and Biosphere Breakerway are both on. See the end for a draft timetable. **On 4 September, I received confirmation that they were both still on even if we don't get more than the four people we have now. The Biosphere Breakerway people normally need a minimum of 8 – we are unlikely to be able to do it for so few again.**

All of our tours to southern Africa have all 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.

This trip is based on a number of things I have done on previous trips plus others I'd like to do. While there will be some serious walking, you will not need to carry a full pack on any of the walks. Exactly when the trip will begin will depend on the wishes of the first people who book. Earlier tends to be colder but better for wildflowers.

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

We've 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

We'll do a big loop beginning and ending in Cape Town. We'll spend at least two, probably three, nights there getting supplies that may be a bit hard to find later. We'll probably stay at Dale Court, a place I've stopped at many times, www.dalecourt.co.za/ It's a relatively short walk from there to the V&A waterfront, one of the biggest shopping centres in Cape Town.

In 2013, we did a three day section of the five day Hoerikwaggo Trail in 2013. I've been able to contact our guide from that trip. Part of the trail has burnt but he has organised a different three day



On the trail on top of Table Mountain



Hoerikwaggo view stop

version. We finish on Table Mountain, probably coming down the cable car.

After the Hoerikwaggo, we collect our hire cars and drive back to a different part of the Cape of Good Hope where, if it's available, 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

Click a photo to see a larger version plus a caption. We recommend scrolling through the lot.

For more information about Olifantsbos see

http://www.sanparks.org/parks/table_mountain/tourism/availability_dates.php?id=410&resort=39

The Cedarberg

This is a must. I've been to different parts of the Cedarberg many times. Each time is different so I'd like to go back. Exactly what we do will be determined by the weather, the interests of the group and the vehicles we have available. In 2016, some of us did a great day walk that was possible only because we had two vehicles and some of those who didn't want to do the really long one were happy to do a shorter walk after dropping us off. We did another through walk, half of the group walking in each direction.



Approaching the Maltese Cross, Cedarberg day walk

For general park info about the Cedarberg, see <http://www.capenature.co.za/reserves/cederberg-wilderness-area/> and <http://www.capenature.co.za/reserves/matjiesrivier-nature-reserve/>

In 2016, we stayed at Groothuis on the Driehoek Guest Farm, nice enough so I'd like to go back. See <http://www.cederberg.co.za/accommodation/driehoek-guest-farm>

There is a private observatory in the Cedarberg which is open to the public on weekends. If we're there on a weekend (the draft schedule has us there on a weekend), you might enjoy a couple of hours there. I did on the one visit I managed some years back. <http://www.cederbergobs.org.za/>

Further north we have Travellers Rest, <http://www.travellersrest.co.za/>. I've stayed there a couple of times and have done their short walks. Nice scenery, not too hard, good rock art.

Still further north is a place called Gifberg Guest Farm, <http://www.gifberg.co.za/>. I stayed there with a group in 2008 and did some of their walks.

Here's a comment I wrote at the time. "They have four marked trails there: 2, 4, 7 and 20 km. Phil did the 4 km walk, the rest of us decided to walk 5 km down the 20 km track to see a big waterfall. We found two San art sites on the way, one was fairly faded, the other excellent, bichrome, red & yellow. The water was icy but two people went in anyway. Lots of flowers in bloom everywhere. There was another waterfall and another set of paintings on the 4 km walk. I suspect it would be worth staying there for a couple of nights on a future trip and doing more of the walks."



Gifberg waterfall, look closely and you can see one of our group

If we get as far as Gifberg, we may as well drive up Vanrhyns Pass. This will take us across the border into the Northern Cape. There are several possible short walks at the top. Great for flowers as well. We did this on the 2008 trip. As the photos show, the weather could have been better but it was still very worth doing.



Kokkerboom or quiver tree



On the waterfall walk near Vanrhyns pass.

Two of my former clients who are going to be in the area about a month before we are sent me some suggestions. “The trip report mentions Traveller's Rest near Clanwilliam and also Vanrhynsdorp. If you have any participants who are interested in wildflowers, September is a great season in Namaqualand. The dirt road from Traveller's Rest to Nieuwoudtville via Boterkloof is very scenic, and there are some great single-day

and multi-day walks in the Oorlogskloof NR west of Nieuwoudtville only 10 km off the main road back to Vanrhynsdorp. Also some very pleasant day walks at Namib Namakwa resort west of Springbok, but that's even further away from your chosen area of Western Cape.” (I've done a couple of Oorlogskloof walks.)

“Another interesting route from the Clanwilliam or Calvinia area back towards the Worcester area is via the Tankwa Karoo NP, scenically a very different region entirely. No marked trails as far as I remember in the park, but there are no dangerous predators so you are free to walk wherever you like there. Also no petrol stations between Clanwilliam/Calvinia and Ceres, so you need to have low-consumption and/or large-gas-tank vehicles.”

For more on Tankwa Karoo see <https://www.sanparks.org/parks/tankwa/>

We'll have to make that call when we see what kind of range we have on a tank of fuel.

In any case, we will loop our way back south toward the town of Hermanus where we've been able to organise a special version of the three-day Biosphere Breaker Way, a walk I've wanted to do since I first heard of it.

One place we may stop on the way is Limietberg where we can do a day walk.

<http://www.capenature.co.za/reserves/limietberg-nature-reserve/>

The Biosphere Breaker Way is a guided tour, walking by day, great accommodation at night, where the emphasis on the walks is the incredible fynbos vegetation in southwest South Africa. I find it fascinating and am really looking forward to the walk. See <http://www.breakerway.com/>

We finish with an even more amazing touch of luxury, the Wellington Wine Walk. I did it in 2013 and have been looking forward to doing it again ever since. See

<http://www.winewalk.co.za/index.html>

See also our photo gallery from the trip,

http://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/wine_walk.shtml



View on the Wine Walk

or the notes which describe it,

http://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/pdf/wine_walk.pdf .

The Breaker Way and Wine walks were so heavily booked that we couldn't get in to most of them. The organisers have juggled things to create a special Breaker Way beginning on 8 November and Wine Walk beginning on 12 November. They already have bookings for 2018 so this a one-off chance to get in at a relatively late date.

What does it cost?

South Africa is one of the few countries where the Australian dollar still goes a long way. Our fee is \$1695. 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 \$1695 covers the guide, who also acts as organiser and sometimes the cook. 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\$30 to A\$70 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.

Some of the accommodation will be in self-catering cottages. Participants will be encouraged to share in the cooking and/or cleaning up. If everyone takes a turn, it's relatively easy for all concerned.

Based on our recent expenses, we do not expect the whole trip, including airfares, to cost less than \$5500 or more than \$7500. This does not include any souvenir shopping you may do. We should have a more accurate estimate closer to departure. The following shows some prices.

Sample costs per person - Australian dollars at exchange rate on 11 August 2017.

Item	Rand	Australian dollars
Flight (ex Sydney)	—	\$1700 approx
Travel Insurance	—	\$200 to \$350
Car Hire including fuel *	—	\$300 to \$400
Dale Court twin share per night (valid to 30 Sep, may go up)	700	\$66
Olifantsbos Cottage (six people, share rooms, per night) **	720	\$68
Hoerikwaggo Trail 3 days guide, 2 nights accom, transport **	2795	\$263
Driehoek six people sharing per night **	120	\$12
Wellington Wine Walk (3 days, 4 nights)	8640	\$840 approx
Biosphere Breaker Way includes extra night at end	7540	\$730 approx

* Car hire is based on three people per vehicle with a manual transmission. If you can't drive a manual, we can pay a bit extra for automatic. Cost does not include extra insurance. Cost of insurance can be as much as the excess. Most travel policies will pay an excess. Make sure yours does.

** Prices based on six people. If we have less than six, there will be an additional cost for some items. All prices are based on twin share.

We'll list more prices, more accurately as we continue to make bookings.

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 most of the food shopping for the self-catering cottages and overnight walks (if any), organising accommodation etc. 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. As we will only be visiting the Western Cape, we are probably better off paying individually for each park we visit. I'll check this again when the itinerary has been finalised.)

Note 2. Some of what you get for your money is not very visible. Bushwalking in South Africa is restricted, even for some day walks. Where possible permits should be arranged well in advance. If we want to stay in park accommodation, bookings need to be made far in advance.

While we will be in some sort of accommodation every night, some of that accommodation is self-catering and far from any store. This means that 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 next section. 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 or all of the walking will be on marked trails 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. 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, Toyota Condors on another, 4WDs on others. We've seldom 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. **I currently have a knee problem which makes it impossible for me to spend much time sitting in a position that requires keeping my left leg bent. Unless something changes, that means I'll need to spend most of the time in a front seat unless we get a vehicle where I can stretch my leg from the back.**

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 walked over really rough ground, you might find some of the terrain very challenging. On a long day walk in 2016, only one person, the guide, chose the most strenuous but most spectacular route on one of the walks. (Having said that, a family with two children under the age of 13 followed close behind the guide on the hard route. It wasn't **that** hard, just looked it.) 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, a suggestion and a timetable.

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 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.

The dates which appear in the draft itinerary remain somewhat tentative.

Please do not book flights until we have confirmed the final departure.

Conditions

1. The full \$1695 is now payable. In addition, I need a total of \$1500 so that I can pay for the Wine Walk and Biosphere Breaker Way. More will be payable later.
2. Our cancellation fee is now the full \$1695. 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. Both the Biosphere Breaker Way Wine Walk charge a 25% cancellation fee, rising to 100% closer to departure.
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

Draft Timetable

- xx Oct You might want to arrive a bit earlier for some sightseeing. Weather permitting, Robben Island where Mandela spent so many years in prison is an excellent excursion. Many other things to do.
- 20 Oct Russell and others arrive Cape Town, check into Dale Court.
- 21 Oct Cape Town, preparing for trip
- 22 Oct Begin guided walk. 7 AM. Transfer from hotel to Cape of Good Hope reserve lighthouse and Hike via the False bay side in the Cape of Good Hope reserve ending at the entrance gate to be transferred to the Slangkop tented Camps.
- 23 Oct 7 AM. Transfer to Chapmans Peak and hike to Oranjekloof tented camp via East fort and Chapmans Peak drive and Vlakkenberg to overnight. Food and luggage to be dropped off after you have started the hike.
- 24 Oct 6:30 AM. Hike to Kloof Nek via Kasteelspoort going through Disa Gorge or you can opt to finish at the cable car. Meet driver with luggage and food and be transferred back to hotel. (We'll probably opt for the cable car.) Overnight Dale Court.
- 25 Oct Collect car(s). Drive to Olifantsbos Cottage (if available). Short afternoon walk.
- 26 Oct Full day walk from Olifantsbos.
- 27 Oct Drive to Driehoek in the Cedarberg
- 28-31 Oct In the Cedarberg
- 1-7 Nov Inland from Cedarberg back south toward Hermanus
- 8 Nov Arrive Hermanus in the afternoon. **Accom at Windsor Hotel.**
- 9 Nov Biosphere Breaker Way, day 1, accom at **Windsor Hotel.**
- 10 Nov Biosphere Breaker Way, day 2, accom at Kapensis Guest House, <http://www.3flavours.co.za/>
- 11 Nov Biosphere Breaker Way, day 3, accom at Kapensis Guest House
- 12 Nov Leisurely start. 2 hour scenic drive to Wellington, overnight at Diemersfontein.
- 13 Nov Wine Walk, day 1
- 14 Nov Wine Walk, day 2
- 15 Nov Wine Walk, day 3; special accom provided by Wine Walk people
- 16 Nov Return to Cape Town
- 17 Nov Trip ends, fly home or additional sightseeing in Cape Town.

Breakerway Info – email of 4 Sept

Thank you for your provisional booking on our Biosphere Breaker Way 3 Walk.

Elaine has really twisted our arms as we don't normally accept groups under 8 pax and you're coming all the way from Aussieland.....!

I have made the booking for your party of 4 to arrive at the Windsor Hotel, Hermanus on Wednesday 8 November 2017.

Please find quotation attached to this mail of which we require a 50% deposit of R15 080 now to secure your booking and the balance of payment at least 1 month before your arrival date i.e. 7 October 2017.

The provisional overnight bookings for your accommodation are as follows:

Wednesday 8 November 2017 : Arrival at the Windsor Hotel after 2pm. Overnight at the Windsor Hotel. (You will not be at Wildekrans as I was lucky to get an apartment at the Windsor which is near the old harbour)

Thursday 9 November 2017 : Walk day 1. Overnight at the Windsor Hotel.

Friday 10 November 2017 : Walk day 2. Overnight at 3 Flavours Guest House (now known as the Kapensis Guest House)

Saturday 11 November 2017 : Walk Day 3. Overnight at 3 Flavours Guest house.

Sunday 12 November 2017: Depart for Diemersfontein in Wellington