



suitcase around - well, that's the Fynbos Trail in a nutshell.

"Fynbos has all the answers," declared Christoff Longland, our trail guide. After three days of hiking alongside Christoff, Botanist Sean Privett and seven other hikers, I discovered that 'wilde els' relieves clogged up sinuses, ear ache, even malaria, while sour figs can be used to treat jelly fish and blue bottle stings, sunburn and mouth ulcers. Waxberry can be used for stomach ailments or to polish shoes, while wild dagga should be used for a detox. For improved memory, look no further than blue sage.

**S**ituated between Gansbaai and Stanford in the Grootbos Nature Reserve, The Fynbos Trail has attracted hikers from around the world since 2011 and it's easy to see why. Imagine hiking through a lively wilderness of diverse fynbos, learning about the qualities of local flora and fauna from expert guides, having all meals prepared for you, sleeping in comfortable accommodation and not having to worry about lugging your

The Fynbos Trail exists today thanks to the passion and drive of Sean and a handful of local land-owners who were dedicated to rehabilitating the area's indigenous vegetation. According to Sean, two-thirds of the plants seen along the trail are found nowhere else on earth. A staggering 765 plant species of Fynbos have been recorded on the reserve, 67 of these have been identified to be of conservational concern and a total of six plant species, new to science, have been discovered.



**DIRECTIONS TO THE START**

Take N2 to Somerset West. Either follow the N2 over Sir Lowry's Pass or take the R44 along the coast onto the R43 to Hermanus and then on to Stanford. Eight kilometres past Stanford on the R43 look out for the Fynbos Retreat sign on your left. Follow the gravel road for 900 m, turn right and follow the gravel road for 1 km. Turn left at the Fynbos Trail sign and drive 1 km to the trail parking at the Growing the Future project.



# FINDING THE FYNBOS TRAIL

STORY BY FRANKI BLACK

The Fynbos Trail - a three-day, 25-kilometre "slack-packing" route - is joining the ranks of popular South African trails such as the Otter Trail and the Whale Trail.

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this 60 000 years ago. As a hiker on the Fynbos Trail, you can choose one of three options. Option one is the catered and guided option, option two is catered, but unguided and option three is the self-guided and self-catered package. We'd signed up for option one and having all previously done hikes the traditional way, it took some getting used to. Our first night was spent at the Witkrans Nature Farm where Sean and his wife treated us to a wine tasting and a delicious homemade meal. They made everyone in my group feel part of the extended family. Michelle had to protest every time anyone offered to help set the table or clear dishes. She'd respond with, "Relax, this is your holiday." After tasting Sean's organic Witkrans Cabernet Sauvignon, we feasted on a hearty beef-and-vegetable potjie and Michelle's mom's famous chocolate pudding. After dinner, I fell asleep to the sound of croaking frogs.

**DAY 1: UNIQUELY SOUTH AFRICAN**

I arrived at the Grootbos Nature Reserve after a 90-minute drive from Cape Town and Sean welcomed me like a long-lost friend. Within minutes of leaving the parking-lot, we were walking through the indigenous Grootbos Milkwood Forest. Like wise old men, ancient Milkwood trees peered over us as we trekked in childlike wonder.

Sean pointed out the matriarch of the group: a grand, intertwined tree estimated to be 2000 years old. We made our way onto a gentle hill covered in proteas, pincushions and buchu. "Surprisingly, the Fynbos Trail is one of the only experiences in South Africa where you can actively learn about the uniqueness and incredible diversity of fynbos," Sean shared.

The walk itself is suitable for anyone with an average level of fitness with hikers ranging from age 3 to 85. Day one is a 6.5-kilometre walk, day two 12-kilometres and day three 7-kilometres. Most of the terrain is relatively flat, but along the way there are a few steep ravines, an ancient limestone hill and a mountain summiting at 409-metres. Hikers can either walk a

**DAY 1 ITINERARY**

**Ancient trees and magnificent views**  
**3 hour walk | 6.5 km | Steynsbos to Fynbos Retreat**

- Rendezvous with expert guide
- Visit internationally renowned Growing the Future project whose trainees provide fresh produce for along the trail
- Trail begins with magnificent panoramic views over Walker Bay to the distant Cape of Good Hope
- From the summit of Grootberg 360° panoramic views of sea, wine lands and fynbos
- Lunch and a swim at Stinkhoutsbos on Flower Valley [www.flowervalley.org.za](http://www.flowervalley.org.za)
- Plant your own tree as a contribution to the Stinkhoutsbos forest restoration programme
- Late afternoon, relax in the tranquillity of Witkrans [www.witkrans.co.za](http://www.witkrans.co.za) or Bodhi Khaya [www.bkr.co.za](http://www.bkr.co.za) with dinner and Lomond wines

leisurely loop around the mountain or hike to its summit for panoramic views of the Uilkraals Valley, Dyer Island, and Hermanus to the west.

Warm rays of sunlight warmed our skins, as rain gently descended on the land. In a gesture of gratitude, the plants glowed luminous. Sean continued whilst pointing to the sandy trail, "Studies show that prehistoric people inhabited nearby caves for more than 60 000 years and I'm convinced that they walked this very path for hunting and gathering." Fynbos-rich mountaintops surrounded us, medicinal aromas filled the air and bright pink candelabra flowers lined the way. There was no sign of human interference in sight and I imagined the land to have looked just like



**DAY 2 INTO THE WILD**

Our shared journey coupled with the desire to reconnect to Mother Nature ensured that everyone had bonded by day two. Sean and Michelle wished us well, as we followed Guide Christoff into Flower Valley. "Fire is the lifeblood of Fynbos," explained Christoff, pointing to a silver-edge pincushion, "Ideally the veld needs fire every 10 to 15 years, as it's the trigger that causes growth." Christoff, an animated man with a generous laugh, turned out to be a complete nature whiz. Passionately, he shared stories about plants and insects that brought them to life. "The precious seeds of the pincushion – pollinated by sugarbirds – fall to the ground by late summer," he explained. "From here the seeds are taken underground by indigenous ants who are attracted to their waxy seed covers.

Only after fire, will these dispersed dormant seeds germinate," he revealed. Stunned by the small and quiet miracles around us, we continued to the Stinkhoutsbos Forest for tea. This unexpected tropical forest seemed better suited to the Congo. During World War Two the forest was apparently heavily exploited by local wood merchants who put Italian prisoners to work on its trees. Christoff tells us about one of the farmers in the area who remembers going there as a child. He quickly learnt that spaghetti can be eaten from a tin and how to swear in Italian. After tea, we all got to choose an indigenous tree, which we planted in the forest as part of its continued restoration. The summit of the Grootberg was our next acquisition. Following a rocky patch, we reached its peak but in the not-so-far distance

an ominous curtain of rain approached. Hastily, we took in the superb views and marched on to the protective Witvoetskloof Forest known for its impressive waterfall. Despite the rain, Christoff's passion remained unquenchable. He continued telling us about the wonders of assassin beetles, tumbling lizards and blood-red April Fools lilies that only bloom two to three weeks after fire. Our destination that evening was the Fynbos Retreat, an upmarket hostel situated in the middle of the wilderness. Retreat managers, Jan and Pertida Rabe, welcomed us to a roaring fire. From their outdoor oven, they served up a tasty selection of pizzas, followed by homemade malva pudding. Like old acquaintances, we sat around the fire reminiscing about submarine adventures, family sagas and travels.



**DAY 2 ITINERARY**

**Peace and tranquillity**  
**6 hour walk | 12 km | Fynbos Retreat to Witkrans | Bodhi Khaya**

- Early morning swim in the beautiful dam and a fresh farm breakfast
- Walk into the Witvoetskloof Valley with its magnificent fynbos, indigenous forest and waterfall
- Unique fynbos on the limestone ridges above the forest

**DAY 3 ITINERARY**

**Birdsong and beauty**  
**4 hour walk | 7 kilometres | Witkrans | Bodhi Khaya to Grootbos**

- Into magnificent fynbos and hidden pockets of indigenous forest alive with birds in the Baviaansfontein valley
- Feel part of a Tolkien novel among ancient gnarled milkwood trees covered with dense lichens in the Grootbos forest
- Leisurely lunch overlooking Walker Bay at Grootbos Garden lodge
- Depart with many wonderful memories, a Fynbos gift and a signed copy of the definitive guide to the Fynbos of the Walker Bay region
- Ancient Steynsbos forest with thousand year old milkwood trees
- Descend into ancient white stinkwoods and wild olive trees at the freshwater spring in the Witvoetskloof valley
- Overnight at Beautiful Fynbos Retreat [www.fynbosretreat.com](http://www.fynbosretreat.com), immersed in nature enjoy dinner under the stars



"BE FAITHFUL IN SMALL THINGS BECAUSE IT IS IN THEM THAT YOUR STRENGTH LIES."



**DAY 3: WALKING ON SUNSHINE**

The clear sky and bright sunshine was like a God-sent miracle when we woke up. Jan and Pertida served breakfast and waved us goodbye as we left for our final day on the trail. Within an hour of walking, we spotted the spoor of a Cape Leopard and analysed the fine lichen on a tree. En route, Christoff pointed out a pair of sunbirds readily calling to one another. Pastel-pink King Proteas stood abloom, alongside yellow Ericas and purple fire daisies. We moved onto higher territory from where views of Walker Bay's indigo sea beckoned. Next to the path Christoff demonstrated the merits of the grey-wooly Helichrysum bush (also known as Bushman's bedding) by lying horizontally on it. "The Bushmen wisely used this shrub as a mattress, because of its softness and the fact that it repels insects," he explained.



**YOUR HOSTS**

Sean and Michelle Privett and family at Witkrans Farm, [www.witkrans.com](http://www.witkrans.com), a member of the Walker Bay Fynbos Conservancy, [www.fynbos.co.za](http://www.fynbos.co.za). Sean is an internationally renowned guide to the fynbos, has a Masters Degree in botany and an enormous passion for fynbos and its conservation. He is co-author of the book, Field Guide to the Flora of Grootbos Nature Reserve and the Walker Bay Region. Michelle is involved in developing and promoting a number of conservation initiatives in the Walker Bay region. Email: [info@fynbostrail.co.za](mailto:info@fynbostrail.co.za), Tel: +27 (0) 82 4111008 or +27 (0)82 4645115 [www.fynbostrail.co.za](http://www.fynbostrail.co.za)

**ALSO AVAILABLE...**

Add on a coastal day at the beginning of the trail which includes: Bed and breakfast in De Kelders, fresh lunch at the Growing the Future project, whale watching from de Kelders cliffs in season, a visit to the Klipgat Cave, learn about early coastal inhabitants, walk the coast and magnificent dune field of Walker Bay Nature Reserve.

Intrigued by the simple wisdom of the Khoisan, we trekked downwards towards the Growing Future Project, a Fynbos farm where unemployed women from the Gansbaai area are given sponsored training in life skills and organic food production. Sadly, this destination marked the end of our journey, but there was one last treat on the itinerary: lunch at the 5-star Grootbos Garden Lodge. Sean transferred us to the lodge where ice-cold beers awaited. Our weary appearance after three days in the wild seemed a little out of place in the luxury of the Grootbos Restaurant, but we were graciously welcomed by our hosts. Our final meal together was

a regal spread of pickled snoek salad, Cape Malay Seafood Curry and Grootbos Honey Ice Cream. We'd hiked for a mere three days, but I emerged on the other end feeling different. Nature had comforted and rejuvenated me and I was inspired to learn more about her bountiful wonders. We had all reconnected to the small things. Technology had become a distant memory; instead, we'd focused on the gold in a frog's eye, the delicate threads of a rain spider's nest and the miniature pools of water formed on a lily leaf. Mother Theresa said it perfectly, "Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies." ☺

**THE ESSENTIALS...**

**RATES (1 APRIL 2015 – 1 MARCH 2016) FOR 3-DAY HIKE**

- Option 1** Full Slack-packing: R2600 – R2800/person (this package includes all meals, accommodation, a wine tasting experience, a guide and a signed Fynbos field guide written by Sean).
- Option 2** Self-guided Slack-packing: R2050 – R2250/person.
- Option 3** Self-guided & Self-catered: R950/person (optional extra: Portage R180/person).

**Good to Know:** Young children can shorten day two's hiking distance by hopping aboard a tractor at the halfway mark. They'll be transferred to the overnight destination.

**Contact the Fynbos Trail:** [info@fynbostrail.co.za](mailto:info@fynbostrail.co.za), [www.fynbostrail.co.za](http://www.fynbostrail.co.za)  
Michelle: +27 824645115, Sean: +27 824111008

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