

Introduction

Note to Travellers

- The access road to the rest camp from the reception will be closed from 23-27 April 2012 due to road works. An alternative route to the camp will be available via the Eastern Drive. Management would like to apologise for the inconvenience but assures the guests that this will better their experience once finished.
- [Recent rains have affected roads](#)

Bontebok National Park is a place of simplistic beauty and peaceful charm. The majestic Langeberg Mountains provide a picturesque backdrop for this Park of colorful riches.

A part of the Cape Floral Kingdom, now heralded as a world heritage site, Bontebok National Park always offers something in bloom.

The Park is proud to promote its achievements in biodiversity conservation, from the endangered fynbos veld type, coastal mRenosterveld to the namesake bontebok! Once these colorful antelope numbered a mere 17, and through effective management we are proud to affirm that the present world population amounts to around 3000. The Park offers much more for nature lovers, from a diversity of indigenous animal life to over 200 remarkable bird species.

The Breede River provides an idyllic western border to the park and offers guests scenery, bird watching, fishing, and a refreshing swimming spot. Visitors can also get a profound familiarity of the Park's endless sights and sounds while on one of the various hiking trails or on a winding bike trip. Furthermore, Bontebok provides its guests with an experience of South African culture.

Connect to the people of the past and learn about how the Khoisan lived and changed through local history. Come and enjoy all we have to offer, from adventure or a lazy day braai to a relaxing stay in a Park of natural and cultural tranquility.

Areas of special interest

Bontebok is an excellent place to use as a home base to visit:

- The wine routes and historic buildings of Swellendam, Robertson, Montagu, Ashton and Bonnievale.
- The hot springs in Montagu.
- A six-day hiking trail that winds through the Langeberg Mountains in Marloth Nature Reserve and is rated amongst the top hiking trails in Southern Africa.
- The Drostdy Museum that will transport you back through the history of the Swellendam area.

5 things to seek

- Bontebok
- Cape Mountain Zebra
- Stanley's Bustard
- Breede River
- Lang Elsie's Kraal

Did you know that...

- The park was proclaimed in 1931 to protect the last 30 Bontebok left in the wild?
- It is also one of the largest remaining 'renosterveld islands' containing several plant species found nowhere else in the world?
- It is also the smallest of South Africa's 20 National Parks?
- It has a high density of rare and endangered bird life, fynbos species and animal life?
- The Breede River runs through it?
- The rest camp is named after the 'Hessekwa' khoi-khoi chieftainess called 'Lang Elsie'?
- The Hessekwa traded with the first Dutch settlers who landed in Cape Town in 1652?
- The park has a spectacular view of the Langeberg mountains?

Accommodation

Lang Elsie's Kraal Rest Camp

The new rest camp called "Lang Elsie's Kraal" named after a Khoe-Khoe Chieftain who lived there with her clan in the 18th century, is the first rest camp in SANParks to be designed from concept to completion according to "Touch the Earth Lightly" design principles.

The concept requires that the units should incorporate the latest thinking in terms of design and materials so as to have the minimum impact on the environment, maximum return on investment, and maximum benefit to the local economy.

- [Chalets](#)

There are 10 new units that can sleep up to four people with two single beds (double bed on request) and a double sleeper couch, you will enjoy majestic views of the Breede River valley and the Langeberg mountain range, which can be appreciated from the private sun-decks to the south and west sides of the units.

- [Universal Access Chalets](#)

Universal access is a key principle applied in the planning of the camp. The new buildings have ramps throughout and are totally accessible to wheelchairs. Two of the 10 units are "special-needs adapted" with bathrooms and living spaces which meet current best practice for use by people with special needs.

- [Camping](#)

- Caravan and tent campsites are located close to the Breede River.
- A maximum of six persons, one caravan with a side tent and one vehicle, or one tent and one vehicle, or one autovilla or one motorised caravan will be permitted per site.
- Additional vehicles will pay an additional fee..
- Not all sites have electrical outlets. Please check this when making your booking. Private generators are prohibited at caravan and campsites.

To view the accommodation prices, refer to [Tariffs](#)

- Birding
- Game viewing from own vehicle.
- Three nature-hiking trails, starting and ending in the rest camp area for overnighters and old pump house for day visitors.
- Bathing in the Breede River – in the Rest Camp Area and at Die Stroom.
- Angling in the Breede River - anglers must be in possession of a valid angling permit, available for purchase at Park Reception.
- Canoeing/Kayaking in the Breede River, with own equipment.

- Biking opportunities available, regular and mountain biking, to increase with Park's project.

Facilities

- Picnic and braai/barbecue sites with ablution facilities are available for day and overnight visitors.
- A shop at the park entrance supplies basic commodities like beer, snacks and soft drinks and curios can be purchased. Fresh produce and other groceries are available in Swellendam.
- The nearest fuel supply is in the town of Swellendam.

Natural & Cultural History

Bontebok National Park was originally established to conserve a species, the namesake Bontebok.

When the species was approaching extinction in the early 1800s some land owners set aside portions of their properties to form temporary reserve for the bontebok. Mr. P. V. van der Byl, his son, Mr. A. van der Byl, and the van Breda and Albertyn families recognised the perilous situation of the species and without their efforts they might well have become extinct.

In 1931 the first Bontebok National Park was proclaimed on an area near Bredasdorp. The Park was later moved to the area it is now, to suit habitat requirements of the bontebok. By 1969 it was estimated that the numbers had grown to around 800. The park now maintains the Bontebok Numbers at around 200, the maximum this park can support taking into consideration biodiversity conservation as a whole.

Southern Africa has one of the longest records of human activity anywhere in the world. The Swellendam region in the Overberg is rich in historic sites dating from over 1 million years ago to more recent colonial settlements. The later Stone Age can be linked to the Khoi Khoi who, in the Swellendam region was known as the Hessequa. This name translated means "people of the trees".

The Hessequa Khoi Khoi entered the Overberg region some 2,000 years ago. They were a clan of herders; farming fat tailed sheep and long horn cattle. The Hessequa's moved freely across the western area of the Overberg and lived on the banks of the Breede River where they grazed their large herds. Every Khoi Khoi settlement was controlled by a captain and at times up to 17 captains would set up camp with their nomadic dwellings at the settlement of the most powerful Hessequa chief.

European settlers landed at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652 and the first contact with the Hessequa Khoi Khoi was in 1660. Lourens Visser, a representative of the Dutch East India Company established a trading post in the area in 1667. To protect the company interests, Drostdy was built in 1745 as the official headquarters and residence for the magistrate. The town of Swellendam developed in 1747 in honour of the Cape governor Hendrik Swellengrebel. Land was cleared of fynbos as extensive wheat and sheep farming ensued.

The arrival of settlers in the Overberg was catastrophic for the indigenous inhabitants. Smallpox, land competition, alcohol and tobacco decimated the clans of the Hessequa's living in this region. Two Hessequa captains and their followers lived in the area where the Bontebok National Park is now situated. The Park's rest camp is named after the first of them, a remarkable female captain by the name of Lang Elsie. Between 1734 and 1800 she lived with her followers at the southern part of the Park, grazing their stock all the way to the Buffeljags River.

Visitors to the park can still see the open werf area where Lang Elsie's kraal of woven reed huts was situated. Next to this open space are the ruins of a small stone house where Captain Lang Elsie lived, according to the author of *Geskiedkundige Swellendam* (Tomlinson, 1934).

Nouga Saree, a contemporary of Lang Elsie, lived with his followers in the western part of the Park, at what came to be called the Ou Tuin. Here too an open werf area is evidence of their settlement. Their sheep and cattle grazed

in the area that is now the old Resies Baan (Race Track), so named as this area was used by the Swellendam Turf Club for their race meetings. It is said that these races were so popular that on one occasion the Kadie, a steam ship, was chartered to transport race goers from Cape Town to Swellendam. Jockeys were drawn from the now servile Hessequa and so dangerous was the track, that many would be killed.

According to authors and residents of Swellendam, the graves of Nouga Saree and some of his people were found at the foot of the small ridge above Ou Tuin when the Bontebok National Park was established. People recalled that the graves were covered with 'blue mountain stones'. Although there are several references to the Khoi graves in the Ou Tuin, these graves are not to be found today. The park is committed to preserving these cultural heritage sites and plans are in place for further research and interpretation of Lang Elsie's Kraal and the gravesite of Nouga Saree.

Acknowledgements:

- Skinner, J.D. (1980). The Mammals of the South African Sub region.
- Tomlinson, L.L. (1943) Geskiedkundige Swellendam
- Van Hemert, M. and Meffert, P. (1991) Die Khoisan van die Overberg. Drostyd Museum, Swellendam
- Van Rensburg, A.P.J. (1975) Die geskiedenis van die Bontebok Park, Swellendam Koedoe, Vol. 18, 165-190

How to get there

Air

The Swellengrebel Airfield is adjacent to the park, suitable for light aircraft.

Car/Coaches

Bontebok National Park is situated ~6km from the picturesque and historic town of Swellendam, 240km from Cape Town and 540km from Port Elizabeth. The park's current entrance is about five kilometres off the N2.

Gate opening and closing times

- 1 October to 30 April: 07:00 - 19:00
- 1 May to 30 September: 07:00 - 18:00

GPS waypoints

- S 34 04' 33.7" E 20 27' 19.3"

Park Map

GPS waypoints

- S 34 04' 33.7" E 20 27' 19.3"



Park Map



Vital Information

Climate

The region has a temperate climate with an average rainfall of ± 500 mm per annum, occurring mainly during early summer and winter.

Day visitors

Bontebok National Park is a great day visitor location. Recently upgraded day visitor facilities include a rest camp and a new road connecting the original park to 700 ha of new land donated in 2000 by the local municipality. The day visitor area is a key site named "Die Stroom", which is a day visitor facility, formerly a recreation site run by the municipality.

The park is easily accessible from the N2 and because of its small size; visitors can drive around the whole park in a few hours. It is a great stopping point between Cape Town and the Garden Route, for a picnic, swim, or small hike to stretch the legs. It also offers passers by and local residents a great braai location or a place to bring the kids.

Check-in and check-out times

- Check-in time: 12:00 Checkout time: 09:00

Office Hours

- 1 October to 30 April: 07:00 - 19:00 1 May to 30 September: 07:00 - 18:00

Internal Road Network

The park's internal roads and entry road from the N2 are gravel roads. The present road network provides two major game drive loops that can be completed in 1-2 hours respectively, depending on game viewing stops.

Vehicle Restrictions

Motorcycles, powerboats and quad bikes are not allowed.

Handy Tips & Hints

- Pets are not allowed in a national park.
- Vehicle fuel is available in all parks (or is available on the park periphery) - South African legislation stipulates that fuel stations will accept legitimate *petrol/fuel/garage/credit/debit cards* or cash as a form of payment for any fuel purchase.
- Firearms must be declared at reception where they will be sealed. The seal will be broken upon departure.
- Motorcycles are not allowed.
- No power boats on the river.
- No private generators allowed at caravan or campsites.
- Doctors, pharmacies, vehicle repair, fuel and police services are available in Swellendam.

What visitors need to take (preparation for the trip)

- Remember to bring along a flashlight, grill, firewood, angling equipment, bathing suit, walking shoes, camera, binoculars and wildlife reference books.
- Consult the Swellendam Publicity Association or Tourism Office for places of interest and activities in and around the area.

Contact Information

For enquiries e-mail [Bontebok National Park](#) or phone us on the following numbers:

- Tel: +27 28 514 2735
- Fax: +27 28 514 2646

Birding in Bontebok National Park

The park is noteworthy as an excellent place to see *Denham's (Stanley's) Bustard*.

Other large and visible species include *Blue Crane*, *Spur-wing Goose*, *Secretarybird* and *Southern Black Korhaan*. *Malachite* and *Southern (Lesser) Double Collared Sunbird* should be seen at the reception building, while the campsite attracts a number of species. Prominent amongst these are *Fiscal Flycatcher*, *Klaas's Cuckoo* (summer), *Acacia Pied Barbet* and *Red-faced Mousebird*. *Pearl-breasted Swallow* are regularly seen. *Sweet Waxbill* frequents the dense riverine bush adjacent the Bree River, while *Water Thick-knee* are regular along the river's

(For more birding information and park bird checklist, go to [Information for Birders](#))

Mammals

There are a variety of mammals that visitors can find throughout Bontebok National Park.

There are about 158 bontebok that traverse the fynbos plain and guests are certain to see this colourful conservation success story. Red Hartebeest, Grey Rhebok, Steenbok, and Grysbok are also about, commonly



amidst the Park's founding species. In addition, there are 8 of the endangered Cape Mountain Zebra that visitors can see.

The Park has various carnivore species including Caracal, Bat-Eared Fox, Cape Fox, and Aardwolf. Although these species are mostly nocturnal there have been day sightings of Bat Eared Foxes and Aardwolf. There are various Mongoose Species and the Breede River provides a perfect setting for Cape Clawless Otter.

Vegetation

The Cape Floral Kingdom, recognized as one of the most biologically diverse areas on earth, is exemplified here.

There is something in bloom year round with the peak flower season in the spring. The vegetation is fynbos and characterized by four major plant types: restioids, ericoids, proteoids, and geophytes. Coastal Renosterveld is a part of this vegetation biome and is found in limited areas. It usually grows in highly fertile soils.

This high fertility has meant that most of the area has been converted to agriculture, with other Renosterveld types also heavily ploughed or used as augmented pasture. It is a vegetation type in need of conservation.

People with disabilities

Wheelchair Access

An in-depth [accessibility profile](#) for Bontebok National Park has been compiled.

Universal access is a key principle applied in the planning of the Lang Elsie's Kraal camp.

The new facilities have ramps throughout and are totally accessible to wheelchairs. Two of the 10 units are special-needs adapted with bathrooms and living spaces which meet current best practice for use by people with special needs. The communal camping ablutions have no adaptations to facilitate use by person with mobility impairments. The information building however is accessible.

(Please see additional information on [Wheelchair Accessibility](#))