



Golden Gate Highlands National Park

Introduction to Golden Gate Highlands National Park

Tucked away in the North-eastern Free State's Maluti mountains lies Golden Gate Highlands National Park. The park's name originates from the brilliant shades of golden sun cast on the park's sandstone cliffs, especially the imposing Brandwag rock, keeping watch over the main rest camp. Vast valleys lay stretched out as far as the eye allows, sketching a perfect background for the environment's wildlife. A superb collection of fauna can be seen roaming around, including black wildebeest, eland, Burchell's zebra and oribi.

Lillies, watsonias and red-hot pokers are speckled over the grasslands, while exciting birdlife (bearded vulture, bald ibis and more) soar high above the interesting assortment of imposing sandstone cliffs, all bent on decorating this piece of paradise to near perfection.

Summertime sees the park designed with rainbow-tinted colours, as all plants and flowers are in full bloom. A winter wonderland can be found during the colder months, with the occasional snowfall transforming the park into an exquisite beauty of nature.

Golden Gate offers a myriad of activity options, no matter what the season. Undoubtedly one of the more exciting choices would be a hiking trail that takes the participant sightseeing around the splendid park that incorporates both the Maluti and Drakensberg mountains in one environment.

There are a wide variety of hiking trails in the Golden Gate area to choose from, depending on the fitness and age-groups of the hikers:

Ribbok Hiking Trail

This two-day, one-night trail can take a maximum of 18 people per group to the very top of Brandwag Butte. Advanced booking is essential and hikers must provide all their own necessities.

Please inquire at the reservations office. The trail starts off with a steep introduction as it ascends up Brandwag. The sandstone cliff formations sighted along the way are definitely some of the most beautiful found in the Free State. Leaving the views of Glen Reenen and other accommodation facilities behind, the trail follows Boskloof. A scenic little stream complements the route. Trailists spend the night at Ribbok Hut, which comes complete with bunk beds, a kitchen area, outside braai area and an ablution block. The 2nd day kicks off with an early start, as it can take up to 8 hours to complete. A stroll along the Ribbokspruit is a great way to start the day. The stopover at the top (2800m above sea level) is greeted with a far off view of Lesotho. The descent goes past a rocky ridge that makes up the watershed between the Buffelspruit (the stream that provides water to Glen Reenen and Golden Gate Hotel) and the stream which flows into the little Caledon River further to the West. Encountering high winds while hiking in these parts is not at all uncommon, which adds to the exhilaration of the experience. Numerous hills, peaks and other natural features are passed on the Ribbok hiking trail such as Brandwag butte, Echo Ravine, Wodehouse Peak, Mushroom Rock and Boskloof.

One can not help but feel success once the Van Reenen campsite comes into view, knowing that you have just conquered one of the most popular (and most beautifully crafted) hiking trails of the Free State.



Wodehouse Peak Trail

The Wodehouse Peak Trail really takes it out of one, as it lasts for 4 hours and takes you near Highlands Mountain Retreat cabins, which are situated 2 260m above sea level. Wodehouse peak was named after Sir Percy Wodehouse, the governor of the Cape in the 1840s, who was responsible for the erection of beacons on the Rooiberge to create a border system. The first beacon was erected on Wodehouse hill.



4 hours
(one way)

Echo Ravine Trail

A vast chamber eroded and hollowed out over the years by the weathering effects of wind and water on sandstone. Today it forms a natural echo chamber which reverberates with any sounds made, giving the spot its name. The Echo Ravine self-guided walk takes you to this magnificent sight, in about an hour.



1 hour
(one way)

Mushroom Rock Trail

Another simple rock formation that was beautified by means of erosion. Mushroom Rock, situated near Glen Reenen rest camp, stands tall and seems to keep guard over the little camping site. Its huge smooth punctures are visible from afar, giving it the impression of 2 or more mushroom-shaped roofs. The Mushroom Rock hiking trail lasts about half an hour.



30 mins
(one way)

Boskloof Trail

One of the more easier trails and one which is not too strenuous. The name translates to "Bush Valley", and trail is about an hour's walk.



1 hour
(one way)

Brandwag Buttres Trail

A hike that doesn't reach the top of the buttres, but still lets the trailists see the area's gorgeous scenery and geology. The trail lasts for about an hour.



1 hour
(one way)

Holkrans Trail

Meaning "Hollow Crag", this walk is about 2km and shouldn't last longer than an hour. The aptly named trail takes you to see the magnificent Holkrans, which very much resembles a cave with its huge hollow opening.



1 hour
(one way)

TRAILS MAP

