The Whale Trail

It's more than just a retreat - it's total surrender.

The Whale Trail is named after the more than hundred southern right whales that return to the waters of De Hoop every year to calve and mate. This trail takes you over the Potberg Mountain with its colourful fynbos, and onto coastal cliffs that hug the shoreline of one of the largest Marine Protected Areas in Africa. Unique habitats and natural contrasts make the Whale Trail of special ecological interest and an exceptional hiking experience.

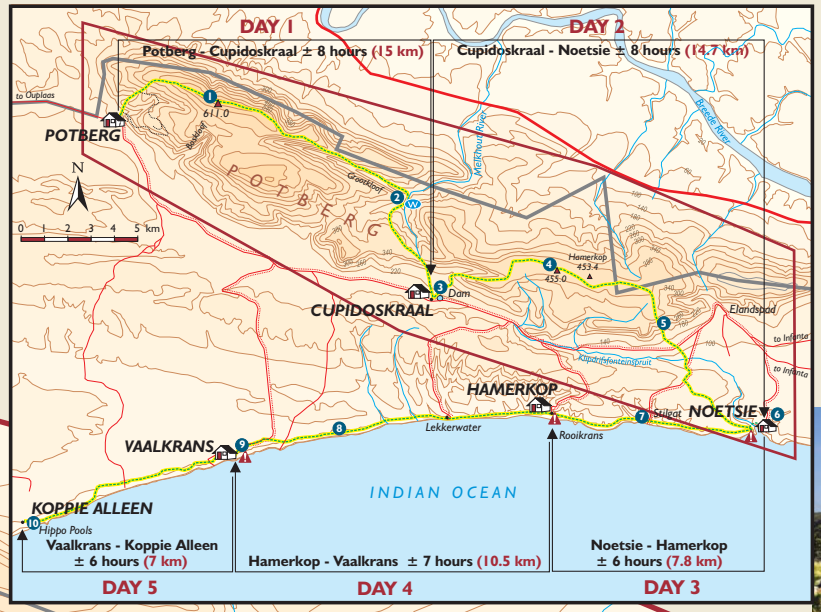
DAY 1

POTBERG TO CUPIDOSKRAAL

(15 km - difficult ±8 hours)

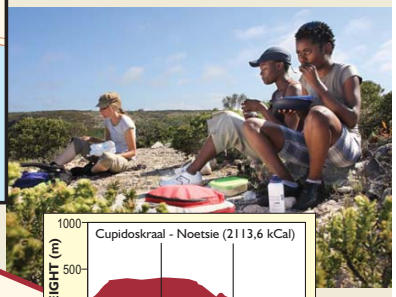
This is the toughest stretch and an early start is recommended. You ascend the Potberg under the watchful eyes of gliding Cape vultures and climb up to the highest point of the trail where you are rewarded with spectacular views. The trail descends along the watershed above Grootkloof where you will find erica and protea species that grow only here and nowhere else in the world!

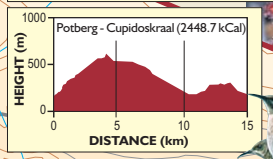
- Whale Trail
- Roads
- Escape routes
- Reserve boundary
- Enlarged map
- Rivers
- Contour intervals 40 m
- kCal Difficulty grading (energy use)
- Mountain peak
- Overnight cottage
- View point
- Places of interest
- Danger
- Snorkelling
- Memorial stone
- Water
- Shuttle bus

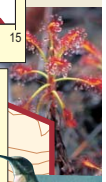
















1 The **radio repeater at 611 m** above sea level is the highest point of the hike.

To the north lies:

- the **Breede River**
- patches of endangered **renosterveld**. More than 95% of this vegetation type has been ploughed up in this area
- **Malgas**
- **Swellendam** and the **Langeberg mountains** on the horizon.

On the eastern bank of the Breede River mouth lies **Witsand** with **Infanta** on the western side of the river.

The **De Hoop Vlei** and **Cape Agulhas**, the southernmost tip of Africa, are to the west.

Southwards are the **limestone hills** and the **Marine Protected Area.**

2 The best spot for **lunch and a swim** is at the second crossing of the Melkhout River. The pepsi-coloured water is safe to drink. The colour of the water is due to an extraction of tannin (also found in tea) produced in the leaves of the organic layers of decomposing fynbos.

Female horseflies are pests in summer. These blood-suckers locate a host by sight and smell. The harmless male subsists on nectar, fulfilling his role as a pollinator of fynbos.

TIP *Use insect repellent and branches to brush the horseflies off.*

3 **Cool off** in the dam at Cupidoskraal.

DAY 2

CUPIDOSKRAAL TO NOETSIE

(14,7 km - moderate ±8 hours)

The trail follows the crest of the Potberg through mountain fynbos with unequalled views of the Indian Ocean and the Breede River. The route finally exits Potberg and leads onto limestone hills with strikingly different fynbos, then descends to the enchanting bay of Noetsie at the coast.

4 Take some **time out** for tea and snacks after the climb.

5 The valley below is known as an **ecotone.** Vegetation of the Table Mountain sandstone (you are standing on it), overlaps with the vegetation of the limestone hills closer to the seashore. Plants and animals specifically adapt to this mixed-vegetation area. The valley is subjected to an active alien plant eradication programme.

6 The hardiness of the protected milkwood tree was sought-after for building boats and bridges. It is believed that the bark extract dispels nightmares.



Thank you for walking
The Whale Trail

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DAY 3

NOETSIE TO HAMERKOP

(7,8 km - easy ± 3 hours of actual walking with 6 hours suggested for several break periods)

There is ample time for exploring the coastline on this stretch. Stilgat is a most enjoyable stop. Several vantage points lie ahead until you reach a beach stretching a short distance to Hamerkop Cottage.

TIPS

- *Venturing onto the edges is dangerous, especially in windy or wet weather.*
- *Look out for bottlenose dolphins.*
- *Watch out for swarms of bees under trees and rock overhangs!*
- *Take care not to trample the vegetation at vantage points.*

Extreme caution!

Please do not leave the path or attempt to climb down any cliffs. The caves are not hiker-friendly. Bees and leopards have taken refuge in these caves over the years.

7 On the **DETOUR to Stilgat** you have to negotiate a chain ladder that is well worth the effort. This spot is excellent for snorkelling and swimming, with pristine tidal pools waiting to be explored.

TIDAL POOL TIPS

- *Always face the ocean - waves are unpredictable.*
- *Wear sandals with good traction.*
- *Never swim alone. Let others know where you are swimming.*
- *The ideal time to explore the pools is one hour before low tide.*
- *Place animals and rocks back where they are found.*
- *Watch where you step! Tidal pool organisms are fragile.*

The notorious bluebottle consists of three organisms floating with a nitrogen-filled "bubble". The "yo-yo" tentacles hanging below have stinging cells with lids. When touched, the lid explodes and releases a barbed tube that inflicts a painful sting, paralysing and absorbing nutrients from the prey.

TIP *If stung, apply juice from the sour fig's leaf or toothpaste.*

† The **memorial stone,** depicting the tragic story of Daantjie de Wet's drowning at Rooikrans, is situated on the rocks. Daantjie's father built the school at Ouplaas (*en route* to Potberg) in memory of his son.

DAY 4

HAMERKOP TO VAALKRANS

(10,5 km - moderate ±6 hours)

The long beachwalk can be quite strenuous. Allow time to rest. On the way you pass Lekkerwater Lodge. Please respect the privacy of the guests. Look out for the shy oystercatchers and whitebreasted cormorants basking in the sun. The intertidal pools on the wave-cut rock platforms and coral reefs are remarkable sights. The last stretch to Vaalkrans ambles through diverse coastal vegetation.

Warning:

Be careful when trying to circumvent rock protrusions by means of the flat surfaces - a sudden wave could get you into trouble.

8 This **DETOUR** leads to blowholes, where water spouts from the rocks at high tide due to waves washing into, and exiting, through holes from the roofs of caves underneath you.

TIP *Please stay clear of the sensitive calcrete formations.*

9 **Vaalkrans** is situated on top of a cave.

DAY 5

VAALKRANS TO KOPPIE ALLEEN

(7 km - easy ± 3 hours of actual walking, with 6 hours suggested for several break periods)

This is a short hike through coastal thickets with ample time to soak up the last of the scenic landscapes. There are two alternative routes for high and low tide. Hippo Pools offers great swimming before the path leads up to Koppie Alleen where the trail ends.

TIP *Please stay on the boardwalks. They were laid out to protect the sensitive dune ecology. Shortcuts will destroy the plants and create soil erosion.*

10 Up to 50 whales at one time have been recorded here. **The boardwalk** at Koppie Alleen leads to the interpretation centre with ablution facilities. Walk up to the parking area where the shuttle will collect you at 12:00.

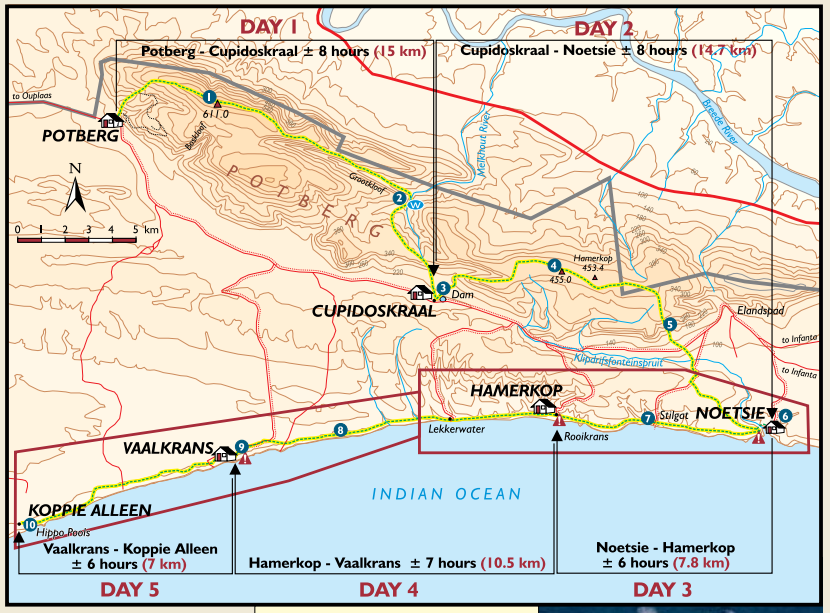
You are here to relax and unwind but please REMEMBER:

En route:

- *Carry your permit with you at all times - it is your passport to the Whale Trail.*
- *Take special care when swimming along this coast, as the rip currents can be dangerous - no lifeguards on duty!*
- *Don't even think about collecting or hunting any live organism, damaging or removing plants, or attempting any type of fishing. Collecting of shells or stones is prohibited.*
- *Carry your litter with you - it is yours and nobody else's.*

At the cottages:

- *Fill water bottles before leaving for the day's hike. There are no water points on the routes except during day one.*
- *Help us recycle. Separate all rubbish, including food waste, into the relevant bins.*
- *Baboons are opportunists and very dangerous. Open windows and doors, and food left within their reach, invite these unwelcome guests to help themselves.*



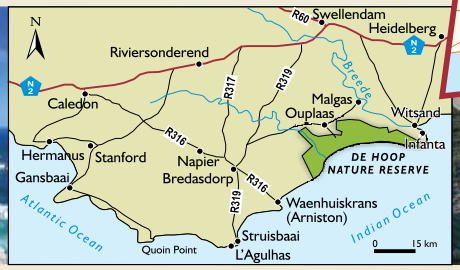
Whale Trail
Roads
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Reserve boundary
Enlarged map
Rivers
Contour intervals 40 m
kCal Difficulty grading (energy use)
Mountain peak
Overnight cottage
View point
Places of interest
Danger
Snorkelling
Memorial stone
Water
Shuttle bus

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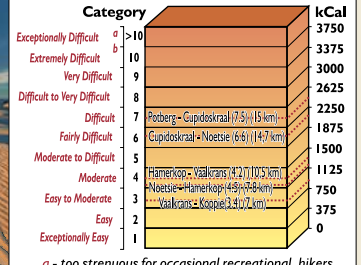






Difficulty in kCal

The rating is done in terms of hikers of average fitness, i.e. people that hike only a few times per year.



a - too strenuous for occasional recreational hikers.
b - normally acceptable upper limit

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