

Day 1 Steynsbos to Fynbos Retreat

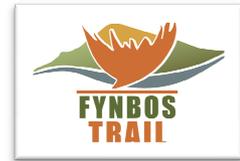
You will start at the Growing the Future sustainable agriculture and life skills training college (34° 31' 18" S, 19° 27' 3.71 " E) on Grootbos Nature Reserve. Growing the Future is all about food production, and 8 women are trained at this project each year in the growing of vegetables and fruit, beekeeping and the principles of successful animal husbandry. You can park your car in the main parking area at the Fynbos Trail parking sign or drive around into the main project site to park under a tree for shade. The trail starts just outside the entrance gate – you will see the Start of Fynbos trail sign.

The trail leaves Growing the Future heading towards the sea before turning northwards through coastal strandveld and winding into an ancient milkwood forest. The Steynsbos forest is one of only eight milkwood forests of its type in the world – all of which are restricted to the Stanford-Gansbaai area. The forest is about 20 ha in size and contains trees that are many hundreds, if not thousands of years old. As a forest island surrounded by fynbos, Steynsbos is an important habitat for many animals and birds not commonly seen in the fynbos. Thirty four bird species including Rameron Pigeon, Cape Batis, African Paradise Flycatcher, Barn Owl, Bar-throated Apalis and Forest Buzzard have been recorded as well as a variety of mammals including porcupine, honey badger, bushbuck and mongoose. The forest was heavily impacted by woodcutters in the 1930's, however some of the largest trees survived and you will see individual milkwoods of over 800 years old.

Leaving the milkwood Forest the trail winds through stands of conebushes and sugarbushes. After a few hundred meters you will reach a jeep track, take a right for a few meters down the jeep track and then turn left onto the path that leads up the hill. This fynbos-clad sandstone ridge is covered in bright red pincushions in winter and spring and a diversity of other flowers throughout the year. The trail then drops down off the ridge and turns left up the valley where you will pass a solar panel that pumps water that feeds the growing the Future project. A little way further up the path you will reach a small dam where the borehole water flows from a pipe into the dam. This pipe water is crystal clear from 100m below the surface and great for filling up water bottles. Leaving the dam the trail heads up to Pinnacle Peak where there are spectacular views over Walker Bay to the west and Dyer Island to the south. A while after reaching the summit of Pinnacle the trail reaches a jeep track where you will turn left and then follow this track for some distance on the northern side of the valley. If you look down to the bottom of the valley you will see your overnight accommodation of Fynbos Retreat. Watch out for the turn-off to the right as you descend into the valley. You will need to take this path to stay on the proper route. If you miss it, the jeep track does also reach Fynbos Retreat. The path takes you down through ancient limestone hills into the valley basin. Once in the valley watch out for another marked turn to your right which will take you across the valley floor and into a beautiful patch of forest. Ignore the signs showing the milkwood trail that goes off to the left in the forest and carry on straight past the spring and then take the signposted left turn down a short steep embankment and then through some more trees to the large white house overlooking the dam where you will be staying for the night or the wooden house overlooking a small dam just below the road.

Fynbos Retreat has a beautiful large swimming dam, short walks in forest and fynbos and is a great place to relax and soak up the wonderful natural environment. There is limited cell phone reception on the farm. The best site for a signal is a short distance up the jeep track that accesses the main house where you will find a cell phone sign. There is wifi available in the houses.

Your hosts at Fynbos Retreat are Jan and Perdita – relax and enjoy the beauty of this wilderness hideaway.



Day 2 Fynbos Retreat to Witkrans

As Day 2 is the longest of the trail we suggest that you aim to leave by 8:30am at the latest. To find the start of the second days trail head for the large oak tree just above the wooden house (Fountain bush cottage) where you should find the Fynbos trail sign and then follow the path across the lawned area until you reach the fynbos and clearly defined trail at the head of the valley. The trail takes hikers down through a beautiful valley characterised by an extraordinary mosaic of fynbos – slopes covered in proteas, pincushions, heather, buchus, reeds and so much more. After hugging the southern side of the valley for some time the trail crosses the stream via a wooden bridge and through a small grove of boegenhout (*Rapanea melanophloeos*) trees to the northern side of the valley. The path then again crosses over the stream through wetland fynbos and then via some quite steep steps down into the shady, lush Witvoetskloof forest. Be careful on this decent into the forest as the steps and boardwalks are especially slippery when wet. The contrast from the surrounding fynbos is staggering as is the natural beauty of the ancient trees that line the river – magnificent milkwoods, white stinkwood, boegenhout, wild olive, assegai trees, rooiels and many others. After about fifteen minutes' walk in the forest you will reach a beautiful waterfall where we suggest you stop for morning tea and a cool natural shower for those feeling brave.

After leaving the waterfall you will carry on down through the forest before crossing over a bridge and ascending out of the forest on the right hand (southern) bank. The climb out of the valley is via a steep kloof in the limestone hills. The slope is north facing and, as there is seldom a breeze in this valley, it can be very hot. About two thirds of the way up the kloof, look out for a small cave in the limestone on the right. As soon as you reach the ridge line you will normally be greeted by a cool sea breeze and the views of Lomond dam down below. The limestone fynbos of the Agulhas Plain region is very rare and many of the species you will encounter in this part of the trail are rare and endemic to the region.

The trail then winds up the eastern slopes of Grootberg with beautiful views of the Lomond vineyards and dam. As you pass through the neck you will see the trail follows the jeep track up to the left. A few hundred meters up this jeep track you will reach a fork in the path with the Fynbos Trail sign showing that the trail heads down to your right. This is decision time.

For those feeling energetic do not take the path down to the right but rather carry on with the jeep track towards the summit. After a short while you will see a path off to the right which is sign posted. Take this path to the summit of Grootberg. At 409m this is the highest point of the Fynbos Trail and has spectacular 360° views with the Uilkraals Valley and Dyer Island to the south, the Kleinriviersberge to the north and Walker Bay and Hermanus to the west. From the summit this short additional circular trail then takes hikers back to the jeep track and down to the point where you had the option as to whether to summit the peak. For the less energetic take the right hand fork off the jeep track onto the single track path heading down the valley.

From here follow the trail that zig-zags down off Grootberg to the jeep track below. Once you reach the jeep track turn right and head up over the spur across a road and on down to the Stinkhoutsbos forest. You are now on Flower Valley (www.flowervalley.org.za), a conservation NGO that focuses on the sustainable harvesting of wild fynbos flowers and community development projects in the region. As you walk through the Stinkhoutsbos afro-montane forest it will be clear that the forest has been heavily damaged by past fires. This is the result of heavy exploitation of the timber resources of the forest by Italian prisoners during the second world war which opened up the canopy allowing subsequent fires to enter the forest and kill many of the remaining trees. Walker Bay Trails together with the Flower Valley Conservation Trust are actively involved in the protection and restoration of this very special indigenous forest. Follow the trail around through the forest until you reach the



picnic tables at the stream at the bottom of the forest where we will have prepared lunch for slack packing groups. You are welcome to take a dip in the refreshing dam down the path just below the forest.

After lunch the trail crosses the stream and exits the forest path above the dam. On the opposite side of the parking area and parallel to, but below, the access road you will find the trail continues down the valley. Follow this path down the valley until you reach a jeep track. Cross over the jeep track and pick up the path heading up the hill. This path winds between the restios which are used for thatching material for roofs in the Cape. The path will cross a stream and reach a jeep track where you turn left. A little while further you will reach a sign showing the split in the route where you need to take the Witkrans route.

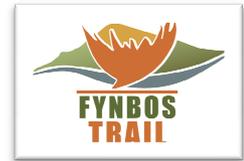
Overnight 2 Witkrans

Stay on the jeep track and follow the flower picking tracks through Flower Valley. You will drop back down and get a good view of the Flower Valley houses and Early Learning Centre, an Eco-school established by the Flower Valley Conservation Trust for young pre-schoolers from the area. Follow the trail markers and you will cross a fire break and enter Witkrans farm, home to the Privett family. The trail follows a jeep track along the contour and then look out for the trail sign to the left that takes you down through a valley and on to Conebush Cottage on Witkrans. Your hosts at Witkrans are Sean and Michelle who you will find at the main farm house a short way past Cone bush. There is a nice swimming dam up the hill from Conebush, enjoy this peaceful place!

Day 3 – Witkrans to Grootbos

Leaving Witkrans

Follow the track from Conebush cottage that leads up to the top dam on the farm. At the dam you will see two water tanks, the trail goes left of the water tanks down the fire break and then right along a single track path that leads to Bodhi Khaya. Once at Bodhi Khaya the trail to Steynsbos and your cars takes roughly three to three and a half hours. The trail from Bodhi Khaya cuts across above the farm houses and dams and then down into the Baviaansfontein Valley. This is a beautiful secluded valley characterised by a mosaic of fynbos interspersed with forest patches. The trail heads along the valley floor before heading up a short steep section where you will come to a T-junction on a well-defined path, where you must turn right. You are now back on Grootbos Nature Reserve and this trail is part of a circular hiking trail used by Grootbos. Ignore the white signs with black arrows that are pointing in the opposite direction and follow the Fynbos Trail signs along this path and through some beautiful patches of indigenous forest. In the first patch you may notice an old fig tree on the right hand side of the trail that was dispersed into the valley from a surrounding farm by birds or baboons. Keep an eye open across to the opposite slope where one often sees grey rhebuck or baboons heading up the slope. The trail will wind up until you reach a well-used jeep track. Take a breather in the shade and then head right up the track. Follow this track ignoring the jeep tracks that head off to the left. After a sharp descent and bend to the left in the track look out for the single track path that leads up the slopes of Swartkransberg. Take this path that will lead you to the summit of the highest peak along the trail (Swartkransberg 514m) with beautiful 360° views. On a clear day you will see your destination, the orange roofed house to the north where your cars are parked at Steynsbos. Follow the trail from the summit down the northern slopes of Swartkransberg where you will reach a T-junction taking the jeep track to the left. A few hundred meters on along this track you will reach the firebreak that leads down towards Steynsbos. Take the track in the fire break and at the bottom turn left on the road and a short while further right off the road down the jeep track past some beehives and back to the Growing the Future project at Steynsbos where your cars are parked.



Should you require assistance on the trail please contact Sean on 0824111008 or Michelle on 0824645115. While some of the ravines and valleys do not have cell phone reception, a climb out onto nearby high lying land will normally provide reception.

Enjoy the Fynbos Trail