The second annual Roof de Karoo mountain bike traverse took place between Mountain Zebra and Camdeboo National Parks over the weekend of 5 to 7 April. The 200km challenge is hosted by the Mountain Zebra-Camdeboo Protected Environment (MZCPE) in partnership with SANParks, with participants cycling over numerous private properties which form part of the 268 000ha Protected Environment.

Repeat participants would have been happy to see that the weather gods smiled down on them this year, as the event was characterised by wet and cold conditions, making the event rather unpleasant last year. Blue, sunny skies and picturesque sunrises and sunsets were the order of the event this time round.

A total of 25 two-person teams arrived in Mountain Zebra National Park on 5 April for registration and a briefing session ahead of an early start the next morning. Pop-up camps were set up at all three overnight stops over the journey.

The first day’s 98km trek sent participants crisscrossing the impressive Karoo landscape – with its unique and diverse fauna and flora and magnificent views. An elevation gain of 1 260m took the group to their resting place for the night – beneath the imposing 2 430m high Nardou mountain peak.

Day two had them making their way over Nardou along an old ox-wagon track. Destination: the Winterhoek campsite in Camdeboo National Park. The majority of the day’s 102km trek was downhill towards the Park, as participants crossed the Sundays River numerous times along the way.

A visit to Camdeboo National Park is never complete without a trip up to the world-famous Valley of Desolation. Those who still had some energy and even some who didn’t, drove up (not on the bikes, but in vehicles, thankfully), just in time to see the sun set from there.

Their weary bodies later welcomed a restful third night under the Karoo stars, knowing that this epic journey was behind them, and looking forward to the next adventure.
Compliment of the month:
Karoo

The young lady at the gate was so enthusiastic about her job that she made us feel very welcome upon arrival. She's doing a splendid job!

The team of ladies at Reception is such a breath of fresh air for any weary traveller. They have a sense of humour and nothing is too much effort for them to assist us with. They are just the perfect face of Karoo National Park. Well done, ladies - you make us feel at home every time.

We were a little unnerved when a large baboon crossed the campsite next to ours, but in a way, it was one of the highlights, as it was neat to see it so close (and because it ignored us, so we didn’t feel unsafe).

Compliments received

Addo Elephant
• Addo by net fantasties!
• My wife and I had an exceptional elephant experience at Addo over the Easter weekend. The Park and all the staff we came across were wonderful.

Camdeboo
• The Koedoeskloof 4x4 trail and the magnificent view from top… It is quite steep at times and very rocky, but a fun trip and the rewards at the top are amazing.

Garden Route
• Love it there and we’ll be there again soon!
• Wildernis... die mooiste van alle mooi!
• My hartsplek!

Karoo
• The best of the best!
• Five stars for this well-run Park, with excellent breakfast choices too.
• This is our most-frequently visited SANParks destination. This is not only because of its location on route to/from Cape Town, but because we love this park and what the management team is doing in managing the Park. Well done, Karoo.

Mountain Zebra
• The cottages are super-so new and with everything you need. Apparently they were only renovated in September last year, so still like new.

Common dolphins wash up at Woody Cape

Fourteen beached common dolphins washed up along Addo Elephant National Parks’ Woody Cape beach at the beginning of April. The Park’s rangers were alerted to the stranding by a group of zoology Nelson Mandela University students doing surveys on the beach, about 31 km from the Sundays River Mouth towards Woody Cape on Tuesday 3 April.

A team of marine rangers were immediately dispatched to the scene to investigate further. Upon arrival they noted that the students had managed to rescue and return four of the animals back to the sea. Unfortunately eight adults, one juvenile and one calf were not so lucky.

Bayworld staff members were informed, and went out on the Wednesday and Thursday to perform post-mortems on the carcasses. Due to the condition of the dolphins, they suspect that the mass stranding occurred sometime on the Monday. From their initial observation, they say they could not see any signs of obvious illness or injury.

In March last year, 38 dolphin carcasses were found washed up along the Sundays River coastline, more or less 10 km from the latest occurrence. This was the sixth reported stranding on the same stretch of beach over the past 40 years.

The reasons for the strandings are not known. Both Bayworld and SANParks staff or on alert should further animals wash ashore. Anyone who finds a marine mammal is urged to contact Bayworld’s emergency stranding line on 071 724 2122.

Message from Dries Engelbrecht, Regional General Manager

We’ve kicked our new financial year in April off with a bang, which is no different to how 2017/18 ended, mind you.

While at the time of writing this our annual visitor statistics are still provisional, but I think I can safely say that from a regional point of view, the number of visitors to our parks between the beginning of April last year and the end of March were notably up on the same period the year before. The same can be said for accommodation bookings in our parks. We should have detailed information for you about this in our next edition.

A huge word of congratulations to everyone who worked tirelessly not only over the weekend of the Roof de Karoo challenge, but for the months leading up to it, for putting together such a smooth, well run event. They’ll be glad that this year posed less challenges on the weather front, as were the participants. I’m sure. Notwithstanding riding 200 km over the testing Karoo terrain they faced takes some doing, whether in rain or sunshine. I’m happy to see though, that even at the finish line and after, they all still had smiles on their faces.

It appears as if the SANParks Honorary Rangers in some of our parks had a busy few weeks. You’ll read all about what the teams in Karoo and Addo have gotten up to on pages 3 and 4, all in the name of fundraising for ploughing back into the parks. We thank you.

Some SANParks staff heeded the call by the ANC for all women to wear black with a doek, beret or head scarf on Friday 6 April following the death of the struggle stalwart, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela.

Affectionately known as the Mother of the Nation, Mama Winnie passed away at Milpark Hospital on Monday 2 April at the age of 81.

#allblackwithadoek
Environmental Education Centres within SANParks play an important role in that they provide a base from which the youth can be educated on cultural and ecological aspects of parks and also where they learn about nature conservation.

There are two such dedicated facilities in the Frontier Region – the Camdeboo Environmental Education Centre and the Grantham Environmental Centre in Karoo.

In Camdeboo, staff offer school programmes which are aligned to the national curriculum. Day programmes ranging from one to four hours as well as overnight programmes can be arranged, ranging from one night to five, depending on the needs of the group. The centre sleeps 48 learners in three dormitory-style units and include ablution blocks. The lecture hall includes audio-visual aids and many displays, making presentations all the more enjoyable for the learners.

While preference is given to educational groups, the centre is also available for private use such as for team building and conference purposes.

Meanwhile, Karoo’s Grantham Environmental Education Centre can be booked by school groups for real-life learning experiences. Programmes here include outdoor activities and guided walks tailored to the visiting groups. Groups of up to 30 people can stay overnight for one or more nights – in nine sharing bedrooms with separate ablution blocks.

While the great outdoors is mostly used as a classroom, the centre also includes audio-visual aids in the lecture rooms. There is a braai area that allows for outdoor cooking on an open fire as well as a fully fitted kitchen.

Both of these facilities are situated within the parks’ boundaries, but away from all other distractions. They are both used extensively during school holiday programmes. For further information or for bookings, please contact the respective parks directly.

Mass flowering of Erica spp (purple hue) in the high lying areas of the Nyathi section of Addo Elephant National Park was evident throughout March. The veld in this section was transformed into a lush green with excellent grass cover and with some plumbago still in flower, thanks to good recent rainfall.

Erica is a genus of roughly 860 species of flowering plants in the family Ericaceae. The English common names “heath” and “heather” are shared by some closely related genera of similar appearance. Erica is sometimes referred to as “winter (or spring) heather” to distinguish it from Calluna “summer (or autumn) heather”.

Karoo National Park and its SANParks Honorary Rangers were well-represented at this year’s annual Beaufort West Agricultural Show between 21 and 24 March. They put up and manned a joint stand consisting of an information desk and selling good old traditional “braai vleis” at the event. The stall was well-supported by patrons to the show, which was evident in the number of enquiries about both organisations as well as in the funds raised through sales, which will be ploughed back into the Park.

Karoo National Park’s People and Conservation Officer, Esna van Zyl, says teaming up to create a larger presence worked well in that it showcased the close working relationship between the Park and the Honorary Rangers, as well as their passion to support the local communities.

The SANParks Honorary Rangers is a group of public volunteers in support of SANParks and assist parks in raising funds, creating public awareness and supplying manpower and equipment to help the parks. These individuals, with their passion for nature and conservation, have played and continue to play an important role in national parks.

Karoo National Park and its SANParks Honorary Rangers at local agri-show

Conservation student, Angelise Andreas, chatting to a visitor to the stall about Karoo National Park.

Addo’s purple carpets after the rain

Mass flowering of Erica spp (purple hue) in the high lying areas of the Nyathi section of Addo Elephant National Park was evident throughout March. The veld in this section was transformed into a lush green with excellent grass cover and with some plumbago still in flower, thanks to good recent rainfall.
**Karoo’s Junior Rangers still going strong**

Karoo National Park’s Junior Ranger programme is one of only two fully functional such groups throughout SANParks, with the other at Agulhas National Park. They are a group of high school learners from schools around the Park who showed a keen interest after the programme was promoted at the different schools.

Headed by the Park’s People and Conservation Department in the form of Esna van Zyl and Jan Jacobs, the second group of intakes is currently in their second year of the programme. The learners, who start in Grade 7 and carry on through until Grade 10, meet at the Park once a month on a Saturday to go through the SANParks course material.

Van Zyl, a former teacher, started the programme in the Park in 2011 when she realised that while it existed within SANParks, there was no such group in the Park. She investigated the matter and learnt that though there was a set national curriculum, it wasn’t up-to-date. She then got in touch with her former counterpart at Table Mountain National Park, Christa Stringer, who also led a well-formed Junior Ranger group at the time, who let her have the new course material she had developed for Table Mountain National Park, based on the nationally set themes. This is when Esna took on the task to develop Karoo National Park’s own course material and the establishment of the full-time Karoo’s Junior Ranger programme.

The first intake of 13 learners graduated in 2016, while the current group of 14 are due to graduate in 2020.

Some of the topics covered under their curriculum include getting to know the Park, the Park’s history, medicinal plants, ecosystems, bird identification, animal identification through tracks and droppings, Karoo plant families, monitoring of animals, invasive plant species, etc. The SANParks Honorary Rangers in the Karoo Region also assist greatly in transferring their skills to the learners.

“Even if these learners never choose to follow a career in conservation, the knowledge about and love for the environment they receive with us over the years will hopefully contribute to them being able to better care for it and pass on what they’ve learnt to others over time,” says van Zyl.

---

**Sanparks Honorary Rangers in the Addo Region organised a snare patrol on 30 March where the valley adjacent to the Matyholweni Gate at the Colchester entrance was covered. Seven Honorary Rangers participated in the snare patrol, with assistance from four armed rangers. As the area was not accessible by vehicles, everyone had to walk on foot and keep an eagle eye out for buffalo and large game which regularly frequent this area. A spotted hyena was seen watching over the work party from the hilltop not too far away. During the morning patrol nine snares were recovered and removed.**

---

**Bowls day in the Karoo**

This year’s annual Karoo National Park Bowling Day at the beginning of April was yet another resounding success. The event was headed up by the SANParks Honorary Rangers in the Karoo Region as a fundraising initiative to plough the money raised back into the Park. A total of 24 teams competed for the day’s trophies and prizes. Not only the teams, but their supporters came out in full force as well. The event organisers say they were exceptionally happy with the turnout. The children were kept occupied on a jumping castle while the parents enjoyed the day playing and supporting their teams.

Speaking at the awards dinner that evening, the Park’s Senior People and Conservation Officer, Esna van Zyl, spoke about the project the Honorary Rangers are involved with. These include the development of a new lookout point along the Podekertjie loop, as well as the renovation of the Mountainview rondawels and camping facilities.

The winners were Eddie Springs’ team, followed by those of Clive Huston and Apie Tinderholm.

The Park staff and Honorary Rangers wish to thank all the sponsors who made the day possible, as well as everyone who attended for their support.

---

**Plenty of interest in bird identification course**

The SANParks Honorary Rangers in the Addo Region hosted their first novice bird identification course for the year in Port Elizabeth at the beginning of April, with 30 participants attending. Thank you to BirdLife Eastern Cape Chairperson, Corne Erasmus, for facilitating.
Garden Route National Park bid farewell to Knysna People and Conservation intern, Asiphe Ranana, at the end of March. We wish her all the best in the next chapter of her career, as she heads to Table Mountain National Park in a Field ranger position.

Pictured with her at her farewell are Mohlamatsane Mokhatla, Social ecologist and Bheki Maphanga, Biotechnician, both from Rondevlei Scientific Services.

Welcome to the Frontier Region’s new Communications and marketing intern, Kaylin Olkers. She officially started working in the Port Elizabeth office at the beginning of April. We trust she’ll use the opportunity to kick off a fruitful career.

Asiphe Ranana has been replaced as P&C intern in Knysna by Thabiso Mokoena. We wish him well for the year ahead.