

TABLE MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

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Celebrating a 10-year milestone in nature conservation



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ON May 29, 1998, former president Nelson Mandela proclaimed the Cape Peninsula (later Table Mountain) National Park – a proud new member of the South Africa's National Park family.

Ten years later, the park can attest to a firm financial footing, such that it is now one of the leading revenue makers within the 22 national parks of South Africa.

More succinctly, Table Mountain National Park (TMNP) is the most visited national park in Africa, with approximately 4.3 million visitors annually. The rocky spine of the peninsula is said, by many, to be the backbone of Cape Town's vibrant tourism economy.

"Perhaps the park is more mature than a 10-year-old protected area could have been expected to be back in 1998 because we've not only consolidated it into one single system of management incorporating 25 000ha of land and 1 000km² of inland sea, but we've also taken that consolidated national park into the hearts and minds of the citizens of Cape Town. Visitor numbers have increased by 8% a year, with South Africans accounting for 73% of this total," says Brett Myrdal, park manager of TMNP.

"I am proud that TMNP is running a sustainable business and attribute our success to our fantastic team who aspire to fulfil their tasks with passion."

Myrdal said it was a great tribute to the team's dedication when TMNP won the Public Sector category award at the annual National Productivity Awards for "outstanding achievement in productivity improvement in the Public Sector Category".

The awards were held at Sun City in September, on the eve of TMNP's 10th birthday. TMNP was also honoured at the Good Hope FM – Best of Cape Town Awards, at which it received an accolade in the "Best Accommodation" category, as voted for by members of the public. The awards were held at the Cape Town International Convention Centre in September.

TMNP was cited for its focus of its resources on its core business – the conservation of biodiversity. Investment of resources in the natural capital of the park has increased from R20m in 1999, one year after proclamation, to R57m in 2006. Investment in tourism and visitor infrastructure grew from R11m to R19m a year during the same period.

"The key to the TMNP's high productivity approach has been our ability to yield results in all three areas of the triple bottom



PRINCIPAL ASSET: "One thing is certain, city leaders will always recognise that Cape Town's principal asset is Table Mountain, in terms of tourism, the lead sector of its economy, and they will want to see that the mountain is extremely well managed. And, they can be well satisfied with that at the moment," says Brett Myrdal, (park manager, TMNP).

line, through a productivity approach based on harnessing labour-intensive nature conservation – alien clearing, path building and afforestation with the equally labour-intensive construction and operation of tourism infrastructure, which then yield social benefit," said Myrdal.

He stressed that TMNP not only plays a critical role in growing the tourism sector, but also sees itself as being part of the urban economic engine of Cape Town playing a strong developmental role.

"We're not only interested in the amount of visits to our business but also in the development of staff in managing those visitors, in the quality of their training, and in the quality of jobs that are developed down the line."

"A prime example is the five-year investment into the footpath network through the rebuilding, re-alignment and maintenance of paths by teams funded by the DEAT Social responsibility programme.

"TMNP spent R43m on upgrading an 800km network of paths across the mountain, which has been a massive employment opportunity and has sustained our poverty-alleviation programme. This programme alone delivered on 400 jobs a year for four years." The Working for Water programme continues to deliver about 250 temporary jobs a year.

Going forward

The challenge now, according to TMNP's management plan for 2008 to 2012, is how to sustain that employment in the future.

The park is involved in a variety of poverty-alleviation programmes and these have helped to create jobs for people from townships surrounding the park.

One of the many benefits of TMNP's consolidated management has been the development of the Hoerikwaggo Trail, a 97km trail that runs from Cape Point to Cape

Town that has been funded by national government's Expanded Public Works Programme.

The six-day, five-night Hoerikwaggo hiking trail offers overnight accommodation. Three of the five planned tented overnight camps have already been constructed in Orange Kloof above Hout Bay, in Silvermine and at Slangkop, on the border of Kommetjie.

Work on the overnight camp at the old forestry station above Smitswinkel Bay near the entrance to the Park's Cape Point section is underway, while the one near the SA Navy's Signal School at Klaver above Simon's Town will start soon.

The trail's employment opportunities not only benefit those who are building the paths and the tents, but are empowering those who work in the running of the tented camps as guides, cleaners, cooks and porters.

"We're turning part-time jobs into permanent jobs. The guides, in particular, now have three-year contracts and as the business viability of the trails improves, we hope to move them to permanent contracts, or that they run their own businesses and provide that service back to us," says Myrdal.

More recently, the park, in conjunction with the Western Cape Provincial Government's Department of Economic Development and Tourism, signed on 14 of these guides on a retainer basis to provide guided day hikes.

They will cover the Lion's Head spiral route; Platteklip Gorge to the upper cable station; the upper cableway station to Maclear's Beacon; the Pipe Track along the base of the Twelve Apostles and The Smuts Track, Skeleton Gorge to Maclear's Beacon. Their rates will be R150 a day, plus R35 a person for a maximum of six people.

The challenges of mountain safety have also provided jobs for the team of highly trained 52 visitor safety officers who patrol the mountain on the lookout for criminals.

"It is fantastic that the challenges we face can be turned into employment opportunities for many South Africans who are currently unemployed," said Myrdal.

Upcoming attractions

Going forward, Myrdal says in addition to TMNP's concessions of Table Mountain and Cape Point, which are its major income earners, its strategy will be to diversify its tourism product.

"We've recently opened up a number of smaller concessions. One is the Roundhouse in Camps Bay, which is a top-quality restored



BRETT MYRDAL

restaurant, and the Koelbaai Boutique Lodge, a 40-bed luxury hotel below Chapman's Peak.

"We're looking at improving the Groote Schuur tea garden, as well as renovating the old Groote Schuur zoo site. We'll be restoring the Herbert Baker building next to UCT into a restaurant and venue for day/night theatre in the next three years. We're preparing to put these opportunities out to public tender."

As an open-access park without fencing or boundaries, Table Mountain National Park has come a long way since 1998, when the heads of agreement with the City of Cape Town essentially agreed to the process of land transfer from the city to the park, and re-established it as a single land-management entity, said Myrdal.

"In future, TMNP will continue to offer visitors seamless interaction with its magnificent mountains plunging into crystal seas fringed with the bleached white sands of the Cape Peninsula.

"There's not an inch of the park that's outside the city, and the mountains in the sea are what makes Cape Town one of the most beautiful cities in the world. When you're driving over Ou Kaapse Weg, for example, you're driving through the park. It's one of the most beautiful drives. You look around and see these magical rocks and riverine forests tucked away in gorges with flushes of colour from the fynbos. You get spiritually recharged. This is the value of the mountain."

"We should never take this for granted nor the fact that there are custodians who are taking care of this precious natural resource, because appreciation and nature conservation go hand in hand."



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Every major city in the world has its' parks, and seaside towns across the globe can surely boast a clean strip of beach or commanding urban forest. But few human centres in the world can come close to matching the offering of our national park situated within city limits.

Stretching southwards from Signal Hill in the city centre to the tip of the Peninsula; Table Mountain National Park is truly a park for all. Situated in the heart of a thriving metropolis and preserving the rich biodiversity of our fauna and flora, visitors and locals alike have been benefiting from its diverse eco and nature offering for the last decade.

Cape Town Tourism offers a variety of handy tips on how to get the most out of visiting the Park. Whether you're an avid hiker keen on the guided and portaged experience of the Hoerikwaggo Trail; a family who loves picnicking with the penguins at Boulders Beach or a thrill seeker wanting to abseil off the top of Table Mountain, our knowledgeable team will tell you how and even make reservations for you at no extra charge.

Our network of world-class visitor centres, conveniently spread across the metropole, offer a variety of services ranging from information on a myriad activities and attractions, to a team of enthusiastic Capetonians just waiting to help you plan and book your next getaway. Most of our centres also sell Cape Town's Wild Cards, exclusive to locals, affording free limited entry to Table Mountain National Park and discounted entry to a number of exciting Cape Town venues.

Pop into your nearest Cape Town Tourism Visitor Centre TODAY and find out what's on offer in Cape Town and surrounds this festive season.

Contact Cape Town Tourism on Tel: 021 487 6800 or E-mail: info@capetown.travel.

We'd love to hear from you!

Congratulations To TABLE MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK on their 10th Anniversary.

Staff and management of: **Cape Peninsula Environmental Services and Contracted Firefighting Unit.**