

# AgulhasNPark eBulletin



South African  
NATIONAL PARKS

VOL 3 • NR 8 • July 2013

[www.sanparks.org](http://www.sanparks.org)

## Conservation Management in the Western Section - Masindi Raselabe, Section Ranger

Agulhas West is managed by Masindi Raselabe (Section Ranger) and Harold Karelse (Field Ranger). We are stationed at Waterford which has the highest point in the park standing at 309m ASL. The western section stretches from the Hangnes area to the west and includes half of Soetnys Mountain, Rietfontein, Rietfontein se Baai, Ratelrivier and Waterford. It borders on Die Dam and Buffeljags area. This section consists mainly of the following vegetation types: Overberg Sandstone Fynbos, Agulhas Limestone Fynbos, Agulhas Sand Fynbos and Cape Lowland Freshwater Wetlands which encompasses the very important Ratel River wetlands system which was majorly impacted by man during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

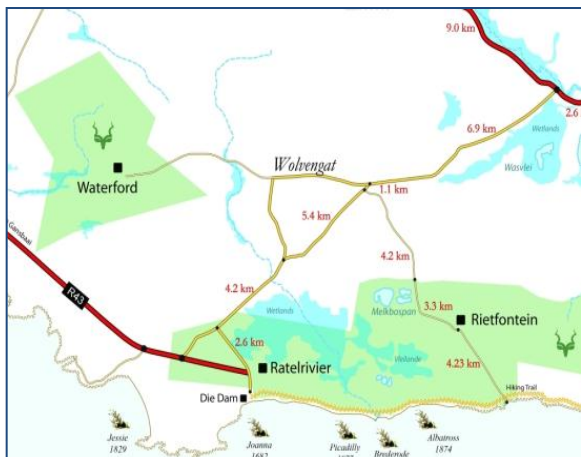


Masindi Raselabe

Harold Karelse

## Open access park

Agulhas Park is an open access park with public roads running through it. Patrols (foot, vehicle, quad bikes, coastal) are done according to a schedule to ensure that no illegal activities are taking place in the park, making sure that the vegetation for which the park was proclaimed to protect, remains protected. All the different methods of patrolling are to limit poaching (abalone and flower harvesting) which is the biggest concern within and around the park.



## Cultural sites

The western section has two important cultural heritage sites: Rietfontein and Ratelrivier. Rietfontein will open soon as tourism accommodation. At present the historic buildings at Ratelrivier are in a process of being restored. Law enforcement around this infrastructure is done to ensure that no illegal activities are taking place.



## Fire-breaks

The park is rich in wetland areas which are very sensitive to fire. To protect them from unplanned veld fires, fire breaks are cut and maintained along the park boundaries. Internal fire breaks are maintained to stop fire from outside, spreading into the park and also to the neighbouring farmers. The fire breaks are maintained annually just before the fire season

## Rietfontein soon open for visitors

Rietfontein is one of the original and oldest Strandveld farms. *Rietfontein aan Zandberg* was awarded to Petrus Arnoldus Gildenhuyzen as a stock post during the time of Matthys J. Lourens's field cornetcy (1746 tot 1794) of *Zoetendaals Vally*. Matthys himself received grazing rights on Rietfontein in 1755. In 1839 the Cape Government registered the land formally in the name of Dirk Gysbert Van Breda. SANParks bought Rietfontein in 2003. The farmstead consists of a typical *langhuis* (long house), a barn and a worker's house enclosed by a stonewall. The eastern section of the house is the oldest. Both the barn and the stonewall are thought to be older than the house and is more than 225 years old. The buildings sadly burnt down completely in 2003, restored in 2009 and was destroyed again in the 2009 fire over Christmas holidays. It was completely restored in 2011.



**Langhuis divided into three units**



**Barn with conference facilities**



**Worker's house with Soetany's Mountain in the background**



**The farmstead from earlier times with coast line in the background**



Rietfontein is situated on the southern slopes of Soetany'sberg, overlooking the ocean and coast line; 63km from the Park's office in L'Agulhas following the Struisbaai-Elim road, turning off at Die Dam sign and turning off at the Uintjieskuil sign. Rietfontein will soon open as self-catering units consisting of three semi-detached units (*Langhuis*), a barn unit and a worker's house unit. In all, Rietfontein sleeps 10 people. The barn also houses a small conference space with its own kitchen and ablution facility.



**Sections of the two century old stone wall around the farmstead**



**Cattle kraal, two centuries old**





## Working for Water (WfW) Contractors showcasing their projects and operations

The WfW project currently employs 287 workers from the surrounding communities. This results in certain operational challenges working with such a large group of contractor teams. Innovative ideas have to be implemented in order to deal with these challenges. For example: new teams and contractors are being mentored to reach the same high levels of production and operational standards infield by the older, more experienced contractors and management teams. There is always somebody within calling distance to support or advice those in need.



On the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2013 Agulhas BSP hosted the quarterly meeting of Cape Nature's Overberg WfW Contractors at Bosheuvel. The organisers approached the Agulhas project to be part of this event to share knowledge of and solutions to problems experienced. The meeting was followed up with an infield visit where experiences, challenges, successes were shared which laid the foundation for future sessions and interactions.



## Agulhas Working for Water (WfW) Health and Safety Awareness Day

Agulhas Working for Water (WfW) annually organizes a Health and Safety Awareness Day at the Bosheuvel Precinct. On this day all aspects concerning the Health and Safety of the project are evaluated and inspected. The 287 beneficiaries form the heart of the project and their safety in the field or on the road is of the highest priority. Read more about this special day and the winners in the August eBulletin.



Before



After

Ratelrivier – turn off to Die Dam

## Working for Water: before and after clearing methods – Stanley Engel, Assistant Project Manager

In previous eBulletins it was reported that the Working for Water (WfW) project had to change the implementation of their programme after the big 2009 fire to contain the quick regrowth of alien vegetation. Now the veld in Agulhas National Park is changing rapidly and returning to its former state. The WfW teams experience this when they work in certain areas. Where in previous contracts they could do foliar application as a method of alien clearing, the situation now requires different methods. Foliar application refers to the use of a registered herbicide to be applied to the alien vegetation with a backpack sprayer. This is done by a qualified herbicider in the team. Due to the regrowth of the natural vegetation, the clearing methods had to be adjusted in order not to damage the fynbos. This requires the team to do hand-pulling of seedlings as well as cutting the plants as low as possible and then stacking the cut material away from the fynbos. In some cases this also requires adjustments to contract person days allocated. These are all part of the project's contribution to protect the rich biodiversity of the Agulhas National Park.



Handpulling



Cut stump





### Questioning the Quagga! – Mick D'Alton

After five generations of careful breeding, the Quaggas are now consistently producing offspring that meet the standard set by the Quagga Project as worthy of the Quagga name. Now we could have free roaming herds in our protected areas that would rekindle the aura and atmosphere of the ancient Cape and enhance the biodiversity of the area. Our own Agulhas National Park could have a wild population of Rau's Quagga if the habitat is declared suitable. But, there are those who oppose this and contend that if extinct it can never be replaced, even though the similarity to the original makes it ecologically and visually acceptable. And even though it originates from the same basic background and fills a niche that has been left by the wanton extermination of the Quagga by our forefathers, it seems that it will not be officially accepted. Now the question to you the reader is, should Rau's Quagga be allowed to dot the plains of the south as its predecessor did in the past or should it remain unaccepted and considered a freak from a misguided experiment?

### Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden, neighbour to Table Mountain NP, a hundred years old

On 1<sup>st</sup> July the Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden celebrates its centenary. In 1902 Cecil John Rhodes bequeathed a piece of his land to the people of South Africa and it was on this piece of land where Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden was established on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1913. The gardens comprise 36 hectares which borders the Table Mountain National Park. It consists mainly of indigenous plants and more than 7000 plant specimens are growing in the gardens. Kirstenbosch was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2004. The Botanical Society of South Africa which was founded to look after Kirstenbosch is also celebrating its centenary this year. To celebrate this centenary, the local branch, the Southern Overberg Branch which will turn 30 in 2014 is arranging various activities with the highlight being a gala lunch at a leading restaurant. Members and special guests including the society's president and Executive Director will be attending. (Edited by the Southern Overberg BotSoc)



Picture: Sharon Brink



The Quaggas can be seen grazing in the game-fenced camp while driving between Elim and Bredasdorp

### And, what about the *Bloubok*?

The Bloubok *Hippotragus leucophaeus* or Blue antelope, confined to a restricted area comprising Swellendam, Bredasdorp and Caledon districts, sadly became extinct in 1799 or 1800 and was the first African mammal known to become extinct. Read more in the August eBulletin. (Painting: Francois Le Vaillant, 1780s)



### World Heritage sites

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) seek to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity. This is embodied in an international treaty called the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by UNESCO in 1972. On 1<sup>st</sup> July 2004 parts of the Cape Floral Region, the smallest but richest such area on Earth, was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, comprising eight sites. (SOURCE: *Village Life*, nr 7, Aug/Sept 2004.) At the moment UNESCO is looking at more sites within the Cape Floral Kingdom to declare as World Heritage Sites.