CARACAL
ECO ROUTE

Namaqua National Park

DESCRIPTION OF ROUTE: Easy to moderate, with occasional sandy sections along the coast. Some sections are steep with dongas and a 4x4 vehicle is essential.

CLOSEST TOWN: Kamieskroon; Garies

CONTACT: Namaqua National Park Tel 027 672 1948

BEST TIME OF YEAR: All year. In wet season/ flower season certain sections may be closed.

DISTANCE: 176-200km, depending on which tracks you select. The complete route can take 6-8 hours. Add another 2 hours from Groen river back to Skilpad if you are a chalet resident.

ROUTE MAY BE CLOSED OR CHANGED AFTER HEAVY RAINS. PLEASE CONTACT THE PARK IN ADVANCE DURING THE WET SEASON (JUNE- SEPTEMBER)

The route allows you to experience a wide range of Namaqua habitats, from mountains to coast. The route starts at the world famous Skilpad Wildflower Reserve– now part of the Namaqua National Park-, where the parks' offices are situated. The road then descents down the Soebatsfontein pass, before turning north to the Wildeperdehoek grass plains. An interesting detour is possible to include the Wildeperdehoek pass. From here the road goes through the Namaqua flatlands. This area is renowned for its 'Riethuis quartz' and the dune areas, which has a dry fynbos type growing here. Crossing the main Hondeklip bay road you will enter the Namakwa Coastal section of the park, which consists of 50km spectacular coastline, before ending at Groen Rriver mouth.

Please note that the Namaqua National park is still in a development phase. SANParks are in the process of various rehabilitation tasks, such as the removal of unwanted structures and fences. Some farmers still have a few years of farming left as part of sales agreements, and farm gates are to be closed at all times.

ROUTE DIRECTIONS AND DESCRIPTION:

THERE ARE NUMBERED AND UN NUMBERED 'CARACAL' SIGNS TO INDICATE THE ROUTE. THIS BOOKLET IS ESSENTIAL FOR FOLLOWING THE ROUTE.

START: Skilpad Office, Namakwa National Park

Skilpad (S30˚09.489'; E017˚46.429') is 900ha in size and has a 6km circular route as well as 2 hiking trails in flower season. The parks' offices and the Skilpad rest camp is situated here. The disturbed farmlands are famous for their annual wildflower blooms in the flower season. Out of season the area attracts game, particularly hartebeest and smaller antelope.

Follow the road towards Soebatsfontein, past the viewpoint and down the cement road as you decent down the Kamiesberg mountains. You will pass some old ruins down at Koeroebees along the Swartlintjies river. (Do not stop in the rivers in rainy season!) Koeroebees was a small settlement around a permanent fountain. The settlement has long since been abandoned. This area is frequented by herds of Gemsbok and springbok. Continue along this road until you get to the Ecoroute turnoff.

NO.1 (S30˚08.280'; E017˚40.256'): Turnoff to Kookfontein
The section between the turnoff and Kookfontein is one of the best game viewing areas during certain times of the year. You will also have to cross the Swartlintjies river, which may be impassable in the wet season.

NO.2 (S30˚04.829'; E017˚38.346'): Kookfontein
Turn right at NO 2 to Kookfontein *(no entry on Kanariesfontein road)*
Follow the road to the palm trees at Kookfontein, which is another abandoned settlement based around a permanent fountain. There is a swimming hole (occasionally filled with water) and some shady palm trees. Basic ablutions are only available for campers (prior arrangement required). Turn left at NO 2 to continue on Eco route.

NO.3 (S30˚04.694'; E017˚38.068'): Turnoff to Witboois river
If you carry on straight past this turnoff you will get to the small town of Soebatsfontein.

Witboois river road split (S30˚02.109'; E017˚36.106').
Option a, **NO.4**: Wildeperdehoek pass via Keerom, to Riethuis.
This option takes you into the Kamiesberg uplands and its spectacular vistas and plants. It will also take you over the Wildeperdehoek pass. The geology of the area is mainly Gneiss of the Kookfontein subgroup, characterized by smooth rock faces and large rounded boulders. This rock is volcanic in origin. Gneiss erodes easily and result in coarse soils, which are poor in nutrients in this area.

Option b, **NO.5**:
This is a shorter option to Riethuis and the coast. Follow the Caracal signs.

NO.6 (S29˚58.627'; E017˚39.084'): Turn LEFT towards the Wildeperdehoek pass.

NO.7 (S29˚57.457'; E017˚38.869'): Turnoff to Luiperdskloof Cottage. Strictly for residents and permit holders.

This area is frequented by leopards and a number has been photographed on camera traps. They are notoriously shy due to persecution in the rural areas of the Kamiesberg. Leopards play an important role in the ecosystem, particularly with controlling certain herbivore populations such as rock hyraxes.

NO.8 (S29˚56.319'; E017˚38.085'): Turn LEFT towards the Wildeperdehoekspass. If you turn right the road will take you to Springbok.

The Wildeperdehoek pass was constructed in the late 1800's, for transporting Copper Ore from Springbok to Hondeklip Bay. The road was constructed under the supervision of Duncan Fletcher, who used convicts as his labor force. The old jail is still visible if you drive 8km towards Springbok. The method used is similar to Bain's methods.

At the bottom of the pass the road splits (S29˚56.156'; E017˚36.465').Take the road to Koingnaas, which will cross the Soebatsfontein/ Kommaggas road further on. The grass plains you are passing through are one of the few grassy areas in Namaqua.

After 29km (**NO.9**; S30˚06.691'; E017˚24.781') there is a road to your left which goes to Soebatsfontein. Take this road for 500m and turn right at **NO.10** (S30˚07.011'; E017˚24.841') (The old farmstead with the red roof) and follow the Caracal signs. Riethuis is in the heartland of the 'Riethuis quartz,' an area of unique and rare succulent plants associated with quartz fields.

NO.11 (S30˚17.412'; E017˚25.930'): The area you are passing through has rare Arid fynbos elements, which gets only 104mm of rain a year. Note the pincushions *(Leucospermum praermorsum)* on the dunes.

NO.12 (S30˚21.195'; E017˚25.569'): Hondeklip bay road crossing.

Cross the Hondeklip Bay road to get to the coastal area. Please remember to close the gates!

If you turn towards the coast at this crossing you will get to the small town of Hondeklip bay. It used to be a port for copper ore exports and later a crayfish factory, but both these activities has long since ceased. There a number of private accommodation options available. The bay is pretty, there is an old shipwreck (the Aristea) and the beaches to the south of the town are stunningly beautiful.

NO.13 (S30˚28.155'; E017˚25.297'): Swartfontein house is a temporary office for the park, from where various rehabilitation and cleaning operations are run. This is also the start of the Groen Spoeg coastal section. In 2008 this section was made available for National park purposes by De Beers Consolidated Mines. The vegetation type is the Namaqualand Coastal Duneveld, and is one of the few unspoilt sections of this vegetation type left. The whole coast provides excellent viewing of vygies in the flower season.

NO.14 Turnoff: (S30˚29.031'; E017˚23.731') to the Spoeg river estuary (S30˚28.568'; E017˚21.453') and caves (.S30˚28.310'; E017˚22.194'):
The scenic Spoeg river estuary is an excellent birding spot, particularly for waders. The caves is a historical and cultural landmark, where signs of sheep farming, 2000 years ago, was found.

The tracks south to Groen river splits continuously and join up again. Some tracks are currently being rehabilitated. STRICTLY NO DRIVING IS ALLOWED ON CLOSED TRACKS OR ON ANY BEACH.

The Groen-Spoeg coast is relatively untouched by human activity. Apart from one fountain there are no fresh water along this 50km stretch of coastline. The cold Benguella current causes regular mist, which in turn nourishes the unique plant communities of this section. The intertidal zone has an exceptional high biomass of various organisms, in particular mussels, limpets and rock lobster.

Rocky shores and white sandy beaches seem to continue forever, with countless beautiful little bays along this whole coast. Look out for Heavisides' dolphins in the bays. This specie is endemic to the west coast.

Bitter river dunefield (S30˚33.626'; E017˚25.543'):
The active Bitter river dunes (sand movement corridor) are a good example of a dynamic, moving dune system. This particular system is in pristine condition, and the only unspoilt and properly functioning system left on the South African coast. The system is protected in its entirety and is a major conservation feature of the park.

Groen river mouth (S30˚49.751'; E017˚34.950'):
This is the end of the Eco Route. Turning to the coast you will get to the Groen River estuary and Groen river lighthouse (not open for visitors). The Groen river estuary is only occasionally opened by wave action, causing sea water to flood the estuary. As the water evaporates it causes salt concentration to increase, making this one of the saltiest on the South African coast. The estuary is often visited by pelicans and flamingoes.

Turning inland will take you to the N7 and the town of Garies. If you are a resident in the Skilpad chalets follow the N7 back to the park.

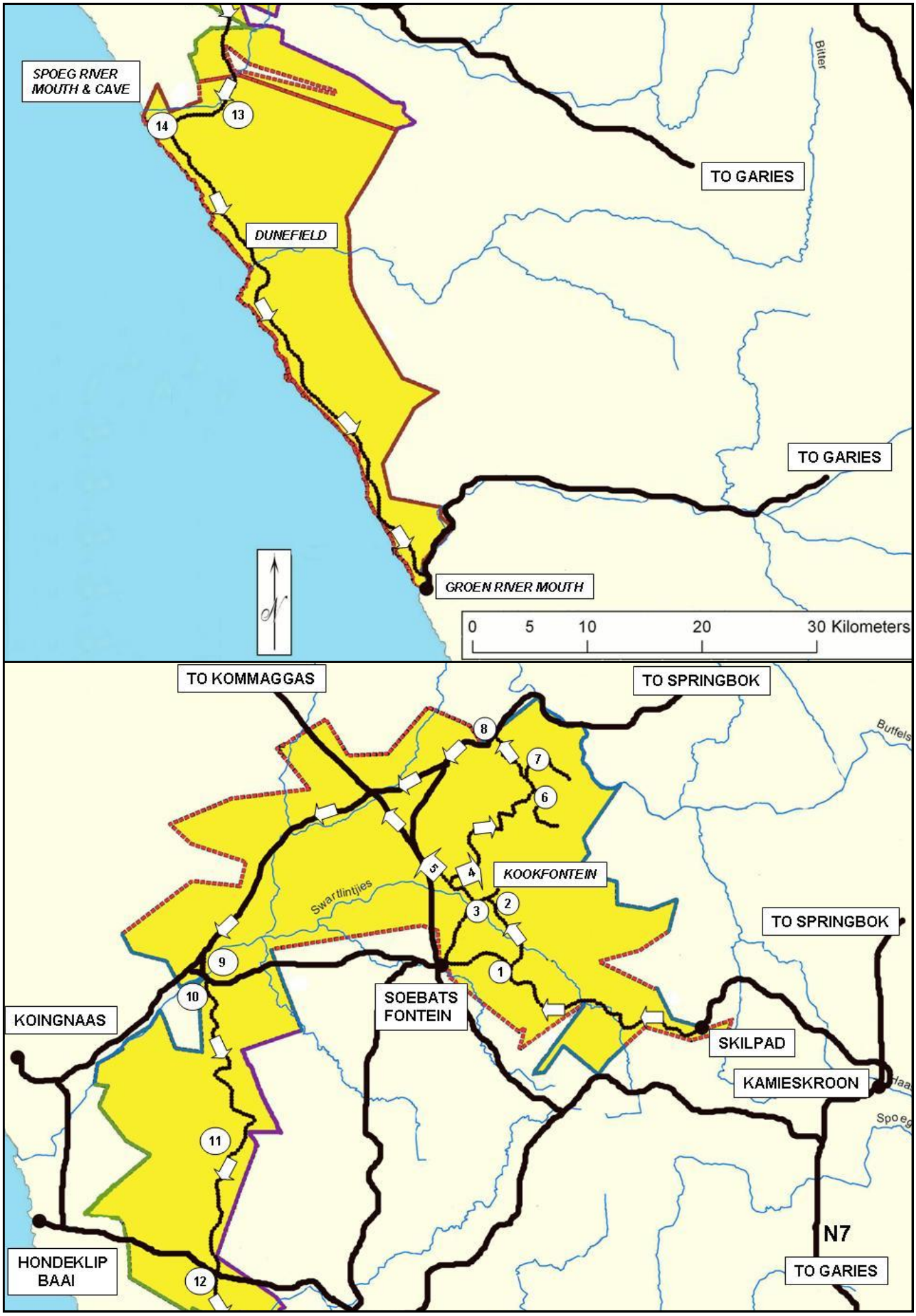
NAMAQUA NATIONAL PARK FACT FILE:

The park was established in 1998 when the 900ha Skilpad Wildflower Reserve was proclaimed. It has since grown to 150 000ha and is still expanding.
The area formally protected in the Namaqua region is currently only 2.9%. Compare this with the national target which is 12% by 2014.
The park has a wide range of habitats, from ocean, estuaries, wetlands, rivers, through to dunes, grasslands and mountains.
NNP lies within the Succulent Karoo, which is an internationally recognized Biodiversity Hotspot. The Succulent karoo has more than 6500 plant species– of which 40% is endemic.
The park has been designed to specifically counter the effects of global warming. The gradient of the protected area will create refuge for species.
There is currently no Marine Protected Area on the entire Northern Cape West Coast. The planned Namaqua MPA will address this anomaly.
Currently the only tourism accommodation in the park consists of 4 self-catering chalets at Skilpad. Additional facilities like camping areas are currently being developed.

ANIMALS REGULARLY RECORDED:

Red Hartebeest (*Alcelaphus buselaphus*)
Springbok (*Antidorcas marsupialis*)
Gemsbok (*Oryx gazella*)
Klipspringer (*Oreotragus oreotragus*)
Steenbok (*Raphicerus campestris*)
Common Duiker (*Sylvicapra grimmia*)
Ostrich (*Struthio camelus*)
Caracal (*Felis caracal*)
Black-backed Jackal (*Canis mesometas*)
Leopard (*Panthera pardus*)
Aardvark (*Orycteropus afer*)
Baboon (*Papio ursinus*)
Bat eared fox (*Otocyon megalotis*)
Cape fox (*Vulpes chama*)
African wild cat (*Felis lybica*)
Suricates (*Suricata suricatta*)
Yellow Mongooses (*Cynictis penicillata*)
Cape fur seal (*Arctocephalus pusillus*)
Heaviside dolphin (*Cephalorhynchus heavisidii*)
Southern right whale (*Eubalaena australis*)
Humpback whale (*Megaptera novgeangline*)

COST of CARACAL ECO ROUTE R100-00 per vehicle PLUS CONSERVATION FEE R24.00 per person 12 years and older for South Africans R12.00 per child aged 2-11 R48.00 per person for SADC members and international travellers
CAMPING WITH TOILET FACILITIES R105.00 per site per night (max 6 pax per site)
PLUS
DAILY CONSERVATION FEE R24.00 per person 12 years and older for South Africans R12.00 per child aged 2-11 R48.00 per person for SADC members and international travellers


SPOEG RIVER MOUTH & CAVE
14
13
TO GARIES
DUNEFIELD
TO GARIES
GROEN RIVER MOUTH
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TO KOMMAGGAS
TO SPRINGBOK
8
7
6
5
4
KOOKFONTEIN
Swartlintjies
3
2
TO SPRINGBOK
9
1
10
SOEBATS FONTEIN
KOINGNAAS
SKILPAD
KAMIESKROON
11
N7
HONDEKLIP BAAI
12
TO GARIES