

Nature and Hiking around McGregor

<http://www.McGregor.Org.Za>

McGregor has a great deal for the nature-lover. The village is situated some 245m above sea level, in a bowl surrounded by rolling hills and lofty mountains. Tributaries of the Breede River, flowing from the Riviersondereind Mountains, pass near the village. In the summer these are fairly dry, but in winter they flow freely.

Good places to start are McGregor's own Krans Nature Reserve and, for a terrific view over the village, the Kleinberg Trail. Also well worth a visit is the nearby Vrolijkheid Nature Research Station.

The area experiences high temperatures during summer, so please avoid the heat where possible, wear a sun hat, and take plenty of water. In the unlikely event of a snake bite, stay calm, try and identify the snake responsible for the bite and rush the victim to the nearest available medical facility. For advice on all cases of envenomation call the Tygerberg Poison Information Centre 021 931 6129 or the Poison Advice Line 0800 333 444

The Kleinberg Trail

This is an easy, 2hr walk up Badge Hill - you can spot the hill from the village as it carries the McGregor crest. To get there you leave McGregor by the old Robertson dirt road, pass the brick works, and the sign posted trail starts on the right. No need to drive to the start of the trail; walking out from the village is half the fun!

The Krans Nature Reserve

Situated just outside the village, this is being developed with the co-operation of the local municipality. Funds have been given by the Rowland and Leta Hill Trust under the auspices of WWF South Africa. The McGregor Heritage Society is presently much involved in this task.

The reserve is part of the meent, or commonage, of McGregor, and used to be available to all villagers for grazing livestock.

Long ago, it was used as a dump. Old bottles, blue glass and other treasures from this time are still found. But centuries before the founding of the village, early Iron Age people must have used the path that runs along the edge of the reserve on migration from the coastal plain to the Little Karoo. Their stone artifacts have been found by archaeologists (ref. Aron D. Mazel, Assistant Director, Dept. of Archaeology, Natal Museum). It is interesting to speculate on their route and possible vantage points for hunting game. Fossil plants are also found in some of the rocks.

Living Plants

The changing habitat of the reserve is an ecotone between mountain fynbos and succulent karoo. Notice how the distribution of plants between these different veld types varies according to the slope and aspect. Circular patches of lush vegetation called heuweltjies occur here and there. These mysterious mounds are probably caused by termites which enrich the soil around their termitarium.

The spaces between the rocks spring into colour in August with wild freesia, barbania and lapeirousia, which look like folded green concertinas until the pale blue flowers open. Chinchinchees (*Ornithogalum*) grow in a marshy area that forms in the winter near the path between the edge of the reserve and the dam wall. Many different species of axalis flowers and a variety of daisies open to the sun. Further along the path aloes, xucculents and mesems become the dominant plants, but bulbs and other geophytes are very common.

If you come to the Krans in summer there will be little sign of these heat- and drought-resistant species as they are safely underground. Bunches of restios, which are still harvested for brooms, grow between the rocks. Yellow euphorbia (melkbos) is common all over the reserve. The koppie harbours a rare species of protea (*P. humiflora*) that hides its mouse-pollinated flowers facing the ground.

Birds

On the path which follows the edge of the reserve overlooking the cemetery, beautiful thorn trees (*Acacia karoo*) harbour many birds.

Some of the most frequently seen are Karoo robins, stone chat, Cape bunting, Cape francolin and lesser doublecollared sunbird. Listen for the occasional call of a soaring fish eagle and look out for hammerkops, which nest at times on the steep cliff. In winter and spring, when water is lying about in the marshes and dams, listen for the strange drumming sound of the "McGregor Phantom" (Egyptian snipe), which dives through the air thrumming its feathers in an eerie-sounding mating display.

Animals

You may see dassies sunning on the rocks, rabbits, hares or small buck - probably grysbok. Jackal and otter have occasionally been seen. Also look out for trapdoor spiders, small reptiles and many fascinating insects.

The Dam

The leiwat dam was built by the people of McGregor in 1951 and stores the irrigation water for the village. It is often home to a family of Egyptian geese and a flock of egrets regularly flies over en route to a roosting site along the valley. The view from the dam wall is spectacular. Different plants make the path that skirts the dam a riot of colour in the spring.

If you wish to become a Friend of the Krans, please send your donation to:

The McGregor Heritage Society
Poste Restante
McGregor 6708
South Africa

Vrolijkheid Research Station

Vrolijkheid, situated about 5 Km from McGregor on the Robertson road, is mainly concerned with the breeding of small game, dealing with problem animals and preservation of flora and fauna. They are also maintain and control of hiking trails and bird hides in the area.

Tariffs apply from 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006. All permits include the reserve entrance fee, with a self-issued permit for the trails beng obtainable at the reserve entrance. Trails may be closed at certain times of the year depending on the weather conditions. Limited accommodation for visitors and environmental education groups may be booked at Vrolijkheid.

Extremely high temperatures may be experienced from November to March, and during this period hikers should set out early in the morning to avoid walking during the heat of the day. A sun hat is essential. No pets, fire arms, picking of flowers or collection of seeds allowed.

For brochures, enquiries and reservations

The Manager	Tel: (023) 625 1621/71
Vrolijkheid Nature Reserve	(021) 659 3500 reservations
Private Bag X614	Fax: (023) 625 1674
Robertson 6705	vrolijkheid@cnc.org.za

Vrolijkheid page on Cape Nature - <http://www.capenature.org.za/reserves.htm?reserve=Vrolijkheid+Nature+Reserve>

Download Vrolijkheid brochure (pdf) - <http://www.capenature.org.za/docs/1123/Vrolijkheid%20Brochure.pdf>

Rooikat Trail

This is a circular, 19 km trail through the Elandsberg mountains, offering scenic views of the Langeberg and Riviersonderend mountains. You are bound to see springbok grazing in the succulent karoo vegetation, and you are advised to start your outing with a visit to the information centre at the entrance for more info on the reserve and its vegetation.

It is fairly strenuous, with the path rough underfoot, and requires 8 hours of walking. Sturdy hiking boots are essential. No water is available on the route, and hikers should carry a sufficient supply (2 litres per person).

Heron Trail

This is an easy, 3km hike through succulent karoo vegetation, which takes you to two shimmering dams. Each has a wonderful little bird hide, well hidden in the reedy surrounds, and a few hours spent in either, of an early morning or evening, should produce a few birding surprises. A total of 175 bird species that have been recorded at Vrolijkheid.

Vrolijkheid MTB

This pleasant circular route of 8 km (\pm 1 hour) meanders through a section of the reserve. Please stay on the marked route. Rate: R60 pp (includes reserve entrance).

Boesmanskloof Trail

Download Boesmanskloof brochure (pdf) - <http://www.capenature.org.za/docs/1185/Boesmanskloof%20Trail%20Brochure.pdf>

This 14km trail winds through the Riviersonderend Mountains in the Robertson Karoo region, and links the towns of McGregor in the north and Greyton in the south. It passes through the Riviersonderend Conservation Area, which is a declared mountain catchment area comprised of state land and private property.

The trail may be hiked in one day, from either McGregor or Greyton, but a popular option is a 2-day there and back route. If you opt for the 1-way hike, it is important to arrange for transport. It starts just outside Greyton, while it starts approximately 14km south of McGregor at Die Galg. Ample private accommodation is available in both towns, with private overnight facilities also available at Die Galg. No overnight camping is allowed on the trail, but there is a municipal campsite in Greyton.

The Boesmanskloof trail leads through spectacular Riviersonderend Mountains with steep gorges, large rock pools, waterfalls (the Oakes Falls) and lovely Cape wildflowers. At either end lie the lush Greyton and McGregor valleys. There is a great diversity of plant species with many different Protea and Erica, and the stream conebush and wild almond growing along the watercourses. Animals found in the area include the Duiker, Grey Rhebuck, Klipspringer, Baboon, Dassie, Spotted Genet and, rarely, Leopards. Birdlife includes the Black and Booted Eagle, Cape Sugarbird, Malachite Sunbird and others.

Physically the trail requires a reasonable degree of fitness as it continuously ascends, descends and contours the slopes of Boesmanskloof. This is winter rainfall area (generally cold and wet) and the summer months are extremely warm and dry. Water may be required during the summer months.

Dassieshoek Nature Reserve

Located near Robertson, Dassieshoek has some spectacular mountain walks. Should you just wish to enjoy the wild environment without a hike, there is a large braai nearby the car park. The reserve is open on Mon, Wed, Fri, Sat and Sun, from 08:00 - 18:00.

For more information, call 023 615 8000, or contact Robertson Tourism on 023 626 4437.

Dassieshoek Trail

This is a 38km, 2-day trail through the foot hills of Langeberg Mountain. It takes you through mountain fynbos and gorges with great swimming. It is rated moderate.

Waterfall Hike

This is an easy walk to rock pools in a secluded gorge, surrounded by ferns and indigenous trees. Great to commune with nature, chill out or swim!

Arrangieskop Trail

Another 2-day trail, this time 20km to the top of Langeberg Mountains. There are spectacular views over Robertson Valley and Koo Valley, with an overnight stop in a comfortable hut; complete with hot showers and a fire! Rated for experienced hikers

Some other walks

Robertson Walkabout

There are two walks around town, mostly passing by interesting building styles, like the Victorian villa built during the Ostrich feather boom and other historical buildings. Booklets are available from Robertson Tourism, 023 626 3681/ 023 626 4437

Fish Eagle Trail

A 8.5km 3hr, trail on the Van Loveren Wine Estate, climbs up the Rooikrans, and has with breathtaking views over Robertson valley, vineyards and mountains. It is rated easy-moderate and costs R20.00 per person. Book on 023-615 1505.

Gecko Trail

A 21km, 6-9Hr trail which starts at Nuy Valley or Simonskloof.
Accommodation is available at either end of the trail. A permit is required.
Call 023 614 1895

Genadendal Hiking Trail

Download Genadendal brochure (pdf) - <http://www.capenature.org.za/docs/1183/Genadendal%20Trail%20Brochure.pdf>

This is a two-day circular route of 25km. It begins and ends in Genadendal at the historic Moravian Mission Church, which dates back to 1738, and leads through private property and the conservation area on both sides of the Riviersonderend mountain range. It provides panoramic views of the Overberg as well as the Worcester-Robertson Karoo. Overnight facilities are available at the church for hikers who prefer to stay the night before starting on the route.

The first day leads past two pools at Groot and Klein Koffiegat, and ends at the farm Die Hoek on the north side of the mountain. Overnight accommodation, including braai facilities, is available here. The second day returns to Genadendal. The trail is fairly strenuous, and hikers should be fit and well-equipped. In summer it can be extremely hot and it is advisable to carry water. Winters are cold and wet and hikers should adhere to weather warnings as the trail can be dangerous in extreme conditions.

The tariff is R60 for adults, R45 for children/scholars. There is a maximum of 24 hikers per day, with a maximum of 14 per group. Separate bookings are required for the trail and for overnight accommodation. For more information and bookings, call Cape Nature on (021) 659 3500.

To the best of our knowledge the information in this leaflet is accurate. However, it is your responsibility to check the information before starting your hike.

Downloaded from the **McGregor Village Website**
<http://www.McGregor.Org.Za>