

on top of the world *the town of Nieuwoudtville*



On the way to the plateau



Oorlogskloof



Nieuwoudtville waterfall on the Doring River

The best way to **Nieuwoudtville** is to travel via the spectacular Vanrhyns Pass, winding up, and up until you arrive in the kingdom at the top of the plains, the **Bokkeveld Plateau**. When you look back a vast section of the *Knersvlakte* stretches endlessly in the direction of the Atlantic Ocean, creating a sensation of floating.

Once at the summit, not only are you seemingly above the rest of the planet but your destination is the home of daisies and bulbs which bloom dramatically in spring, remnants of the ice age, an abundance of natural and human endeavours, and . . . the world's smallest tortoise.

Seemingly in the midst of nowhere, in the lower reaches of the sprawling Northern Cape, the area surrounding the town is a tapestry of diversity. But strolling down the broad, dusty streets gives one the sense of timelessness. The use of stone in the local architecture imbues the town with a character that is unusual and characterful.

The road north leads to a dramatic waterfall, cascading down an eroded gorge on the Doring River. Flowing strongly after winter rains, it contrasts the starkly barren environment. Still further is **Loeriesfontein** and I had to pass the **quiver tree forest** before seeing the substantial wind pump display at the **Fred Turner Museum**.

The *San* were the original inhabitants of the area. Food was mainly sourced by the gathering of edible plants, but they also hunted on a smaller scale. During the winter months the number of animals that were a food source was drastically reduced due to their migration of these to better grazing and water sites. The San then relied on wild plants to sustain themselves. The *Khoekhoe* also inhabited the area, but they lived on the plains rather than the mountainous areas that the San inhabited.

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However, in 1739 a fierce battle took place between commandos at the kraal of a Captain Jantje Klipheuwel and the area subsequently became known as the **Oorlogskloof**. This was amongst the conflicts that finally established colonial settlers in the area.

Today Oorlogskloof is a nature reserve offering magnificent camping and hiking facilities, as well as numerous sites left by the original occupants. Standing gazing down this gorge one senses a bigger time, of aeons, in the creation of such spectacles.

Near the deep ravine is the farm of **Papkuilsfontein**, with accommodation in restored rustic stone cottages. It is fabulous to just roam around, down to the olympic-sized waterfall pool or cycle on the sand roads. Scrounging around in the ruins of an old farm structure I found bottles that had been used as infill, an indication that everything possible was used to build in this isolated environment.

Nearby is a somewhat older relic: a **glacial pavement**, found on the road where you can also reach the **Hantam National Botanical Gardens**. The glacial grooves near Oorlogskloof are evidence of an ice flow some 300 million years ago when southern Africa was part of the shifting *Gondwana* continent.

Bulbs (neophytes) are Niewoudtville's true focal point, however – the title *Bulb Capital of the World* is deserved. When they flower, along the veld daisies in the spring a colourful wonderland is created: nature truly expressing her splendour. To take in the vastness of the spread after good winter rains is almost (well, completely) overwhelming.

But let's not forget that little tortoise, the **Namaqua Speckled Padloper** – he's endemic to the area and been here for a very long time too!

The deep gorge that is Oorlogskloof, a nature reserve with spectacular hiking



A crumbling old farmhouse on Papkuilsfontein



Evidence of glacier movement 300 million years ago