

Riebeeksrivier Rd

. . . a (rie)discovery



Carl Thunberg



Verdant farms line the Riebeeksrivier Road

A little known sand road which derives its name from a river, probably more aptly a stream, runs along the western flank of Kasteelberg in the Swartland. Overshadowed by the more exposed Riebeeks Kasteel and West, this quiet backwater hosts a few surprises.

One of a multitude of rural roads that only connect those who need to get somewhere specific – they are not the road to nowhere, as in the one Talking Heads sang about – this one leads through a scenic landscape, revealing its secrets as you go.

The Riebeeksrivier is a tributary of the somewhat inappropriately named Diep River, which flows through Malmesbury before heading off towards Cape Town and finding its way to the Atlantic near Milnerton.

An early traveller, Swedish botanist Carl Thunberg, travelling with a Scottish gardener (Francis Masson, collecting specimens for Kew Gardens) recorded staying at a farm owned by a certain Johannes Dreyer, situated at the base of the mountain, somewhere near present day Wynkeldershoek. On 9 September 1774 they embarked on an expedition to the summit in a quest for new flora, in the process encountering species that only exist in the locality.

Amongst the endemic finds was a wild hyacinth, *Lachenalia aloides*, and patches of *kliphout Heerla argentea*, one of which was estimated to be at least a century old.



On the south west slopes of Kasteelberg, with a stunning view of Table Mountain, lies the thriving farm, Goedgedacht, on land originally granted for grazing rights to Pieter Robbertsz in 1704. Purchased in 1993 by Peter and Anne Templeton and Mary Lack, three social workers, it was donated the following year to a charitable and educational trust. The farm has been planted with 35 ha of olive groves and the original

Cape Dutch buildings have been restored with an 85 bed conference centre and special venue for weekend weddings added. The income from both these ventures supports the 'Path out of Poverty' programme for rural children and youth.

The olive growing and production is now in the hands of the next generation, Rob and Laraine Templeton, who live on Welbeloon farm (also part of the Goedgedacht Trust) with their small son Grayson.



Mullineux and Leeu Family Wines are situated on Roundstone Farm a little further along the road. After gaining experience in France, California and locally, winemakers Chris and Andrea decided to settle in the Swartland, with the belief that the local conditions and granite and schist based soils were conducive to producing great quality wines.

And so it has proved to be. With a number of Platter accolades amongst others on their cv now, they have indeed created a range of internationally acclaimed award winning wines, with Andrea being declared *Wine Enthusiast* Winemaker of the year for 2016.

Another relatively new addition to the little route is the acquisition of the farm which takes its name from the river, Riebeeksrivier, by Anthonij Rupert Wines, with the expectation of making high quality wines from the unique terroir.

The shale soils are similar to those of the northern Rhone in France and Priorat area in Spain. Coupled with distinctly cooler nights and higher differences to day temperatures in the surroundings this allows the wines to have distinct and unique characteristics.

Over the crest, in effect a miniature mountain pass, you



Andrea and Chris Mullineux strolling the vineyards on their farm



The farm which carries the name of the road, Riebeeksrivier



The 'pass' over a rump on Riebeeksrivier Road

are greeted by an unexpected sign, erected by one of the local farmers, Jerry Damp. It states: 'In memory of the leopards that last roamed these hills in 1885'. Despite persistent rumours some years back that one of the species had been spotted, no actual recording or evidence was produced, so the date on the sign should probably be accepted.

This is not to say that other fauna does not survive on this massif, isolated as it is by farms and urbanisation. Over an admittedly long period I have spotted lynx on a couple of occasions, hares, duiker and members of one of the roaming troops of baboons. The co-existence is probably explained by the relative lack of human invasion of the mountain.

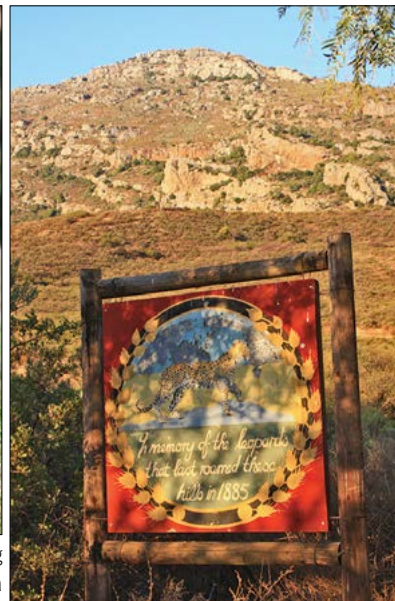
The area is well known to birders too, with Verreaux Eagle, waterfowl, waders, Jackal Buzzard and Blue Crane amongst the species being commonly spotted. Between October and May the Horus Swift may be seen too.

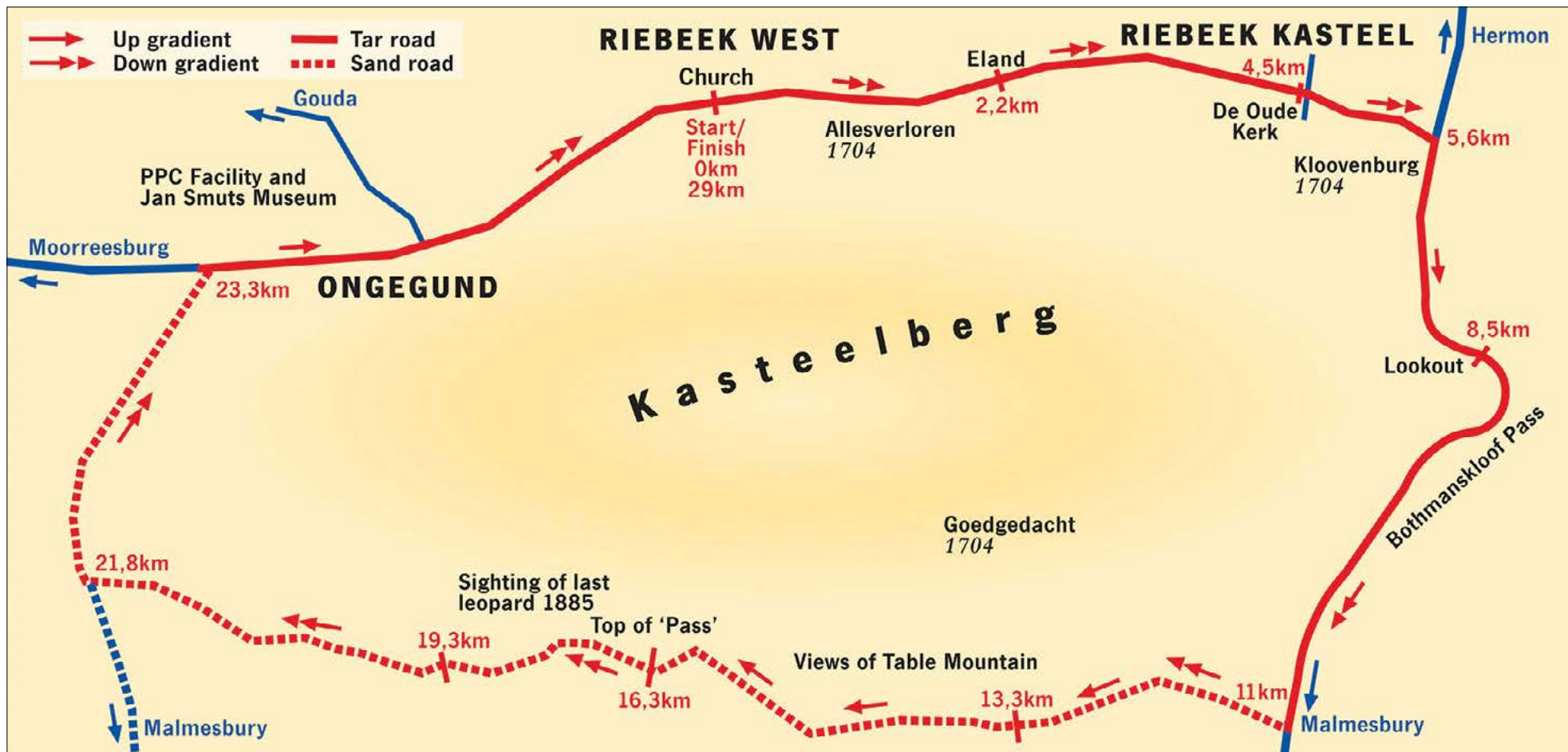
One of the best ways to travel this interesting little road is by bike, allowing time to take in the spectacular vistas and to appreciate the old farms lining the route.

Kasteelberg is the guarding sentinel of the area, standing proud of the surrounding plains. In its shadow the Riebeeksrivier and a number of springs flow; this allowed the first peoples to live here, and subsequent farms to be established and thrive.



A blue crane scavenges for food alongside the road, and a sign bearing testament to the last leopards that once were part of Kasteelberg fauna





Cycling around Kasteelberg gives the best impression of the Riebeeksrivier Road as well as the Riebeek Valley.