

COASTAL FYNBOS TRAIL

This circular trail of about 7 km starts at **Sappershoek** which is located at the east end of the seaside village of **Schoenmakerskop**. An inland route is followed through the coastal fynbos to a cellphone tower, returning to **Sappershoek** along the top of the ridge overlooking the sea.

The area between Schoenmakerskop and Summerstrand is known as **Driftsands** after the shifting by-pass sand dune system that used to cover the area. The sands were stabilized at the beginning of the 1900s. The trail keeps to the sea side of the old by-pass dune systems. In order to stabilize the sand dunes **Australian wattles** such as Rooikrans and Port Jackson were planted as were Eucalyptus trees planted in an attempt to start a commercial forest. Low rainfall (approx 600mm per year), poor soil and strong salt laden winds were not conducive to tree growth and the trees were never harvested commercially. The alien vegetation introduced during these times invaded large areas preventing indigenous vegetation from growing. Much of the alien vegetation has now been cleared from the trail area, allowing the indigenous vegetation to become established.

The underlying rock is **Table Mountain Sandstone (TMS)**. TMS supports **fynbos**, found only between Port Elizabeth and Cape Town. Fynbos is the smallest, most diverse and most endangered of the world's six floral kingdoms, supporting approximately 9000 plant species of which 70% are endemic. Along the trail calcrete outcrops, derived from calcium rich marine deposits and deep dune sands together with variations in topography and the influence of salt laden winds and fire have led to a mosaic of vegetation communities.

The area resembled a desert after huge fires in January 1998. The vegetation has recovered and the burnt areas are dominated by low Asteraceous fynbos. In areas that the fire missed, the **fynbos / coastal dune thicket mosaic** is much taller and the fynbos is dominated by *Metalasia* and *Agathosma* (buchu). Orchids (e.g. *Eucornis*, *Satirium*) are a common sight in spring. Without fire the coastal dune thicket, comprising many forest species, would become more dominant.

On the trail look out for the **butterfly** Thysbe's Copper, that reaches its easternmost limit here. In flight it has a blue hue, but appears orange at rest. Small Grey and Yellow **Mongoose** may be seen as well as **Cape Grysbok**. Keep a good look out over the sea for whales. **Southern Right Whales** are present mainly August – early October, **Humpbacks** migrate along this stretch of coast between April and early December and can give spectacular displays.

NOTE: *Use of the area is entirely at your own risk.*