

ED 2

This cape, by any other name, would be as fair

The cape at the south-westernmost tip of Africa has known many names. In the 1480s, the Portuguese Explorer Bartolomeu Dias dubbed it the Cape of Storms, possibly because he chose to arrive during a tempest in timber caravels that had known better days. Later, at the suggestion of King John II of Portugal, it was given the far more optimistic name, Cape of Good Hope, largely because he reasoned that the discovery of this navigable route around the southern tip of Africa meant that India could be reached by sea, from Europe, giving European traders potential access to the prosperous eastern spice and silk routes.

In 1580, Sir Francis Drake happened upon this tip of Africa during his circumnavigation of the world, and referred to it as: "The fairest cape we saw in the whole circumference of the earth." And, so it became known as The Fairest Cape. Jan van Riebeeck and his compatriots, who arrived in 1652 to settle and colonise, opted for the Dutch name, Kaap de Goede Hoop.

Arguably, the best and most inclusive reference to this south-western tip of Africa was that of former President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela during his inaugural address to the nation on May 9, 1994. "Perhaps it was history that ordained that it be here, at the Cape of Good Hope that we should lay the foundation stone of our new nation. For it was here at this Cape, over three centuries ago, that there began the fateful convergence of the peoples of Africa, Europe and Asia on these shores."

Possibly, the most poetic name

In those early times before the arrival of the European settlers, when only the first People walked these pristine beaches, and only the Khoekhoe language was spoken, Cape Point and the entire Peninsula had far more poetic names. It is not certain what name they used for Cape Point, specifically, but we certainly know what they called Table Mountain. Where the name "Table Mountain" is purely descriptive, the name "Hoerikwaggo" rolls off the tongue (yes, even the Afrikaans tongue) like poetry, and it goes beyond mere description. Hoerikwaggo means "Mountain of the Sea" and, it has been noted, that as you approach from a distance across Table Bay, the mountain looks like it has risen up out of the ocean.

A geological journey through time

Approximately 560 million years ago, the promontory that would become the Cape Peninsula, which includes

Cape Point, gradually emerged from that ancient ocean that geologists have dubbed the Adamastor Ocean. This was an ocean basin that existed before the Atlantic, sometimes referred to as a sort of proto-Atlantic.

Today, Cape Point and the peninsula that emerged from Adamastor feature several distinct types of rock layers. Anyone who enjoys geology as a hobby will, after exploring the Cape Peninsula, be able to distinguish and even identify the various rock types. They are the Malmesbury Group, the Cape Granite Suite, and the Table Mountain Group.

The Malmesbury Group is the oldest of the rock formations, more than 555 million years old. It consists of alternating layers of dark grey fine-grained greywacke, sandstone and slate. Exposures can clearly be seen along the rocky Sea Point shoreline. You'll notice that many of these Malmesbury rock layers are folded almost vertical. This folding was caused by the tremendous heat and pressures that were brought to bear on these rock layers when the ancient continents collided to form the supercontinent of Gondwana.

The Cape Granite Suite formed somewhere between 550 to 515 million years ago as the Adamastor oceanic crust was gradually sliding beneath continental Africa. Heat and pressure caused massive plumes of molten granite magma to rise up from the oceanic slab and crystallise into massive, rounded batholiths that intruded the existing Malmesbury Group. Most of the Cape Peninsula is one of these granite batholiths, but the most easily recognisable example is probably Paarl Rock. These granite batholiths were once 5km to 10km beneath the earth's surface, but have since been exposed due to geological uplift and erosion. Good examples can also be seen at Llandudno, Simons Town and Boulders Beach (where the penguins live). Close up, granite is a light-coloured and course-grained rock, consisting of fairly large white or pinkish feldspar



The cliffs towards the Cape Point Lighthouse

crystals, glassy quartz, and small flakes of black mica. Bellow's Rock, lurking below the ocean surface just off Cape Point, is another prime example of a granite batholith.

Table Mountain Group was deposited from about 500 to 440 million years ago, and consists of three formations, Graafwater, Peninsula and Pakhuis. The Graafwater Formation is the basal layer. It is best

seen along the magnificent Chapman's Peak Drive, where construction work has exposed it. The uppermost overlying layer is the Peninsula Formation which consists of hard, light grey, quartz arenite sandstone, very resistant to erosion. This overlying layer, anywhere from 800m to 1500m thick, is clearly evident in the overly steep cliff faces of the mountain, especially at Cape Point.

The stuff of legend and mythology

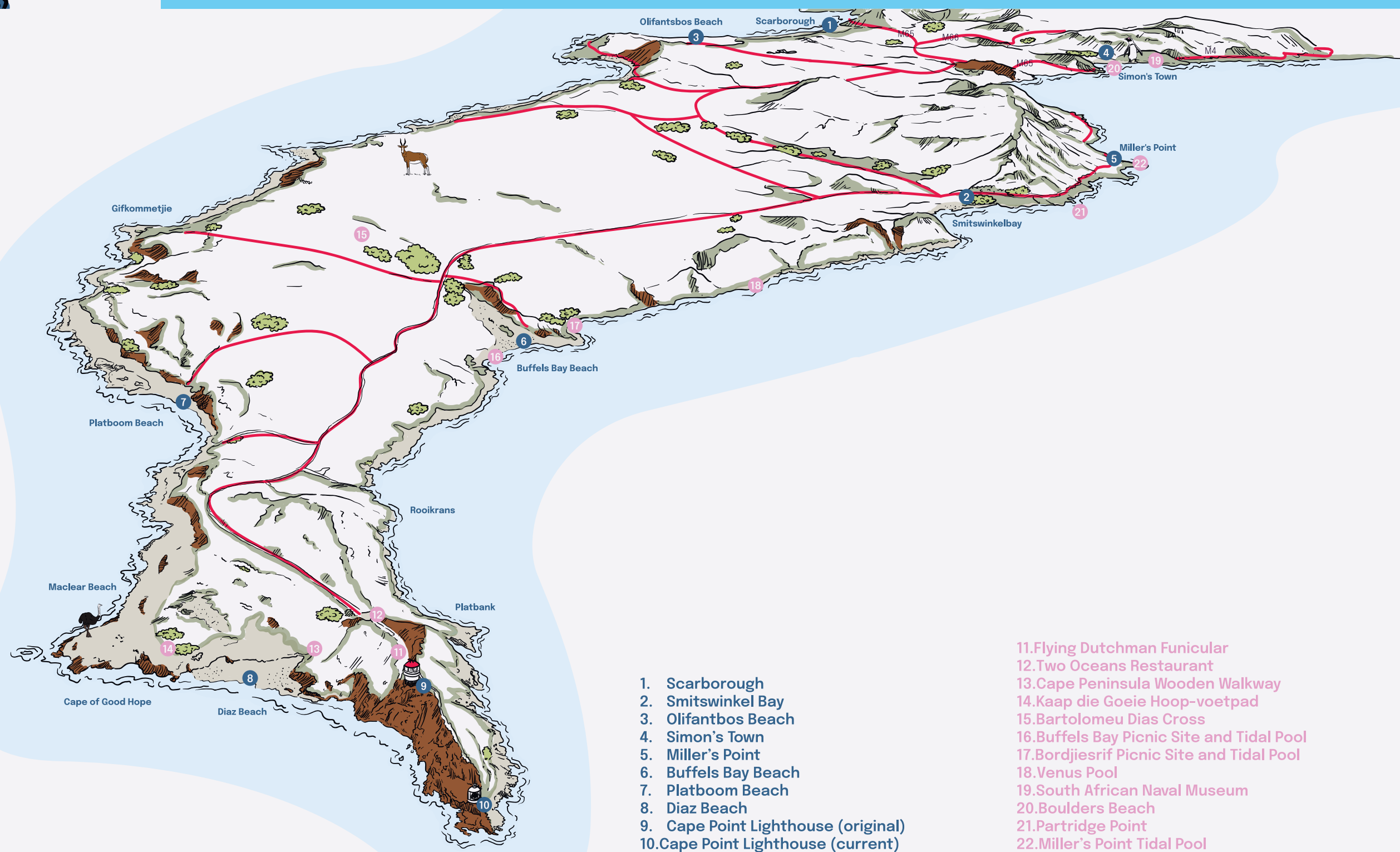
The rugged face of the mountain cliff at Cape Point, as it drops down to sea level, displays the perilous and rough-hewn features that inspired Portugal's greatest poet, Luiz Vaz de Camões, to visualise there the face of a Titan from Greek mythology.

In his poem, The Lusiads, the poet depicts Adamastor as one of the twelve mighty Titans, born of the earth-mother Gaia and the sky-father Ouranos. Of course, Adamastor fights on the side of the Titans in the ten-year war against the Olympian gods, and the Titans ultimately lose. As punishment for supporting the war against Zeus, Adamastor is banished to the Cape of Storms where he is turned into a giant mountain (the Cape Peninsula) with his brooding rugged features hewn into the rockface at Cape Point. The main narrator of the epic poem, The Lusiads, is Vasco da Gama and at one point during the poem, Adamastor says to da Gama, "I am that vast secret promontory" that "you Portuguese call the Cape of Storms."

To this day, you need only stand on those rugged cliffs to see him staring out to sea for all eternity, personifying the Cape of Storms and symbolising the perils of the sea when subjected to the wild forces of nature.



An aerial view of a cliff at Cape Point Nature Reserve



1. Scarborough
2. Smitswinkel Bay
3. Olifantbos Beach
4. Simon's Town
5. Miller's Point
6. Buffels Bay Beach
7. Platboom Beach
8. Diaz Beach
9. Cape Point Lighthouse (original)
10. Cape Point Lighthouse (current)

11. Flying Dutchman Funicular
12. Two Oceans Restaurant
13. Cape Peninsula Wooden Walkway
14. Kaap die Goeie Hoop-voetpad
15. Bartolomeu Dias Cross
16. Buffels Bay Picnic Site and Tidal Pool
17. Bordjiesrif Picnic Site and Tidal Pool
18. Venus Pool
19. South African Naval Museum
20. Boulders Beach
21. Partridge Point
22. Miller's Point Tidal Pool

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Dias and the vanished padrao

On their voyages of discovery, Portuguese navigators used to erect tall stone pillars shaped like a cross, called padraos, when they made landfall on previously uncharted shores. These padraos bore the Portuguese coat of arms. It was their way of telling the world that "Portugal was here." Dias's chroniclers record that he erected a padrao somewhere on a prominence of the Peninsula on 6 June 1488, but we don't know exactly where because it has never been found. Historians speculate that the padrao was probably erected at Cape Point, but also point out that padraos were almost invariably made of stone, not wood, so it wouldn't have been vulnerable to vegetation fire. One thing is certain: the indigenous Khoi People who had lived in the area for thousands of years did not look kindly upon these European voyagers who assumed they could annex the land by planting crosses wherever they pleased. It is entirely possible that the locals simply uprooted the padrao and tossed it into the sea.

A rock and a hard place

Today, when we refer to that narrow stretch of land at the southeastern tip of the Cape Peninsula that juts out into the Atlantic Ocean, we call it Cape Point. It is wild, rocky, and treacherous for vessels that get too close in rough seas or mist.

Since historians started keeping records, a total of 26 shipwrecks have been caused by submerged rocks off Cape Point. By all accounts, the two main culprits



The penguins of Boulder's Beach

Animals you may meet on hikes

Cape Point Nature Reserve is home to a colourful collection of wildlife, many of which can be spotted during hikes. Remember to take only photographs, and leave only footprints. Some of the mammals you're likely to spot are the Cape Mountain zebra, common eland and bontebok. If you're very lucky, you might see a caracal, but these are largely nocturnal cats, and quite shy, so you're only likely to spot one at dawn or dusk. The Chacma baboon is the most southerly primate and visitors should be cautious around them. Don't feel tempted to feed them, and make sure all bags and backpacks are securely fastened and held tight. Baboons have been known to help themselves to visitors' belongings. The dassies (Cape hyraxes) are cute little mammals, about the size of a rabbit, that will scamper over rocks and crevasses to avoid contact with hikers.

Watch out for tortoises so you don't step on them while hiking. They're slow to move out of the way, be patient. The best protection against snake bite and scorpion stings is a sturdy pair of hiking boots, at least ankle high.

Bird lovers should bring their binoculars. Cape Point Reserve is home to more than 250 bird species, many of them endemic to the area. Some of the birds you will spot include gulls, eagles, Cape sugarbirds and sunbirds, as well as the endangered African black oystercatchers. You may see warblers, canaries and shrikes, and possibly even ostriches on the beach.



Cape Point locals - A mother baboon and her young child

are Bellow's Rock and Albatross Rock. Between them, these two submerged reefs have been responsible for 12 of the 26 recorded shipwrecks off Cape Point. Among their most famous victims were the Lusitania (1911), a Portuguese ocean liner nicknamed the Pride of Portugal, the SS Thomas T. Tucker (1942), a Liberty Ship named after the first freed American slave, and the M.V. Nolloth (1965), a Dutch coaster. The wrecks of the Thomas T. Tucker and the Nolloth can still be seen on the beach and rocks at Olifantsbos. The wreck of the Lusitania lies submerged in about 38 metres of water just southeast of Bellow's Rock.

Folklore has it that the loss of the Nolloth had a distinct silver lining for local fishermen. It just so happened that the ship was carrying an appreciable amount of very fine old whiskey, so when his ship struck a reef, the captain steered her towards the beach, hoping to save most of the cargo. By and large, he succeeded, but in the salvage operation that followed, at least some of the barrels of whiskey mysteriously disappeared off the beach, only to be found days and weeks later, by some very jovial local fishermen.

The remains of three wrecks

From the parking lot at Cape Point, take the Flying Dutchman funicular to the site of the old lighthouse. Then look out to sea while facing westward, with the restaurant on your right and the tip of Cape Point on your left. Bellow's Rock is situated directly in front of you about 3km out to sea. On calm days, because it is submerged, it will just look like a dark patch on the surface of the water; but on windy days, there will probably be some white water because waves will break over it. Now try to visualise the wreck of the Lusitania; it lies submerged in about 38 meters of water on the far side of Bellow's Rock, the southeast side.

To see the remains of the Thomas T. Tucker and the Nolloth, you have to start out at the Olifantsbos parking lot, some distance north of Cape Point, and hike along the beach to the rocks beyond the beach. From the rocks, you can see the wreck of the Thomas T Tucker. The wreck of the Nolloth lies a little further along the beach. These two ships were both victims of Albatross Rock which lies submerged about one

kilometer offshore from Olifantsbos Point.

Remember to salute the captain of the Nolloth while you are there. He was the brave captain who had the good sense to steer his crippled ship toward the beach, thus saving lives as well as the precious cargo of whiskey onboard. And while you're there, notice how many birds have built their nests in the two wrecks. It is heartening to see these hulks of scrap metal that we have created being transformed into homes for the more deserving indigenous species of the area.

Le Napoléon: pirate or privateer?

The remains of yet another ship can often be spotted near the carpark at Olifantsbos, but this is a wreck that cannot be blamed on any submerged rocks. They are the remains of Le Napoléon, a French ship that foundered here in 1805 after being chased ashore by a Royal Navy frigate, the Narcissus. Some reports claim Le Napoléon was a pirate ship; others say she was a privateer, commissioned by the French government to capture British merchant

ships, which is credible because it was during the time of the Napoleonic wars. Today, if the tide and the light are right, you can see her outline and some of her cannons.

The legendary Flying Dutchman

Cape Point often boasts sightings of at least one seagoing vessel that will never founder on the rocky coastline, no matter how inclement the weather, because said vessel is a phantom ship. The Flying Dutchman, doomed to sail the seven seas forever, without ever dropping anchor or finding safe port. This legendary vessel is said to be a 17th century sailing ship whose Dutch captain, van der Decken, was challenged to try and round the Cape of Good Hope during a ferocious storm. Against all better judgement, he accepted the challenge, failed in legendary fashion, and can be seen to this day still trying to round Cape Point during stormy weather. He will never succeed, and never find safe port, but he will also never give up. His story is told by the German composer, Richard Wagner,

in his opera Der Fliegende Holländer (1843).

The little Flying Dutchman funiculars that carry tourists from the car park at Cape Point to the site of the old lighthouse, for sightseeing purposes, are named after this legendary sailing vessel of the 17th century.

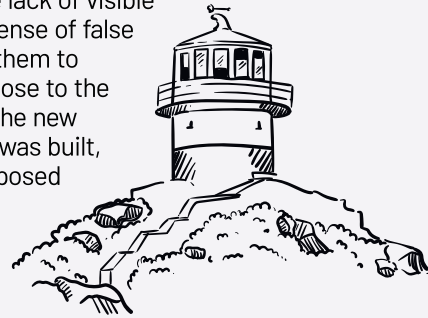


The New Cape Point Lighthouse

A Tale of Two Lighthouses

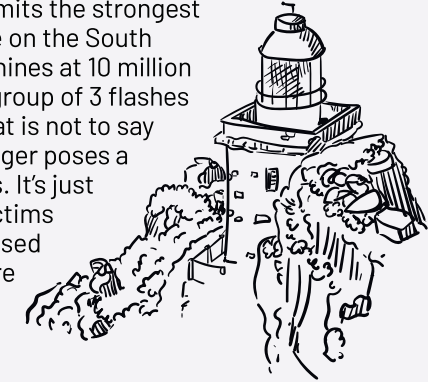
9-Cape Point (Original)

The first lighthouse was built at Cape Point in 1860, after the submerged rocks had taken more than their fair share of unwitting vessels. As lighthouses go, it was impressive. This 8m tall circular cast-iron lighthouse stood a good 238 metres (±781 feet) above sea level, and emitted a flash every 12 seconds, visible up to 32 nautical miles. Unfortunately, during phases of inclement weather, lowering cloud and fog tended to drift down, completely enshrouding the lighthouse so that it could not be seen at all. More often than not, the complete lack of visible light gave captains a sense of false security, encouraging them to venture dangerously close to the rocky coastline. After the new Cape Point lighthouse was built, this old one was repurposed into a watch room and communication monitoring centre.

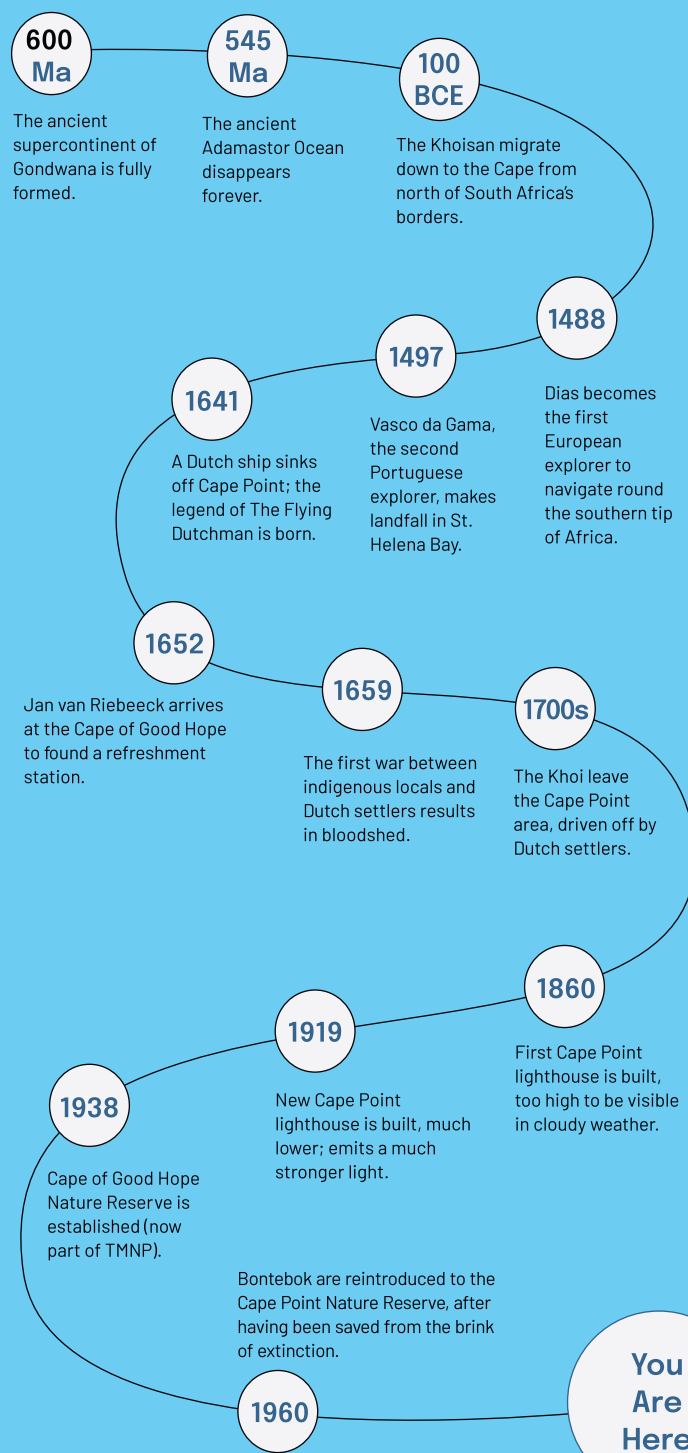


10-Cape Point (Current)

In 1911, the Lusitania fell victim to the submerged rocks off Cape Point, probably due to the cloud-enshrouded and non-visible lighthouse high up on the cliff, resulting in tragic loss of passengers. After that disaster, authorities had no choice but to build a new lighthouse. So, in 1919, a new 9m tall square masonry lighthouse with a white lantern house was built on Diaz Point. The new lighthouse stands only 87 metres (±285 feet) above sea level, and can be seen as far as 63 kilometres (±39 miles) away. To this day, this new lighthouse emits the strongest light of any lighthouse on the South African coastline; it shines at 10 million candelas, emitting a group of 3 flashes every 30 seconds. That is not to say that Cape Point no longer poses a danger for sea vessels. It's just that the number of victims seems to have decreased since the new, far more visible, lighthouse was built.



A Timeline of the Past



FLORA FOR AFRICA

With 1080 species of flora, Cape Point Reserve boasts more varieties of plant life than all of England. Chief among these is the indigenous and ubiquitous fynbos. Because of its unique aroma, fynbos is best enjoyed up close. You can only really experience it while walking through it.

JUST NUISANCE'S GRAVE

While in Simon's Town, visit the grave of Just Nuisance. Many photos of the grave show that locals still leave bouquets in tribute to this much-loved Great Dane. The headstone confirms that he was indeed enlisted in the Royal Navy as Able Seaman from 1940 to 1944, when he died at seven years of age. There is also a life-size statue of him in Jubilee Square, Simon's Town.

Why, you may wonder, would the Royal Navy enlist a very large dog? Because he used to follow the sailors back and forth, even getting on trains with them, when they returned to their ships docked in Simon's Town. Rail authorities took a very dim view and warned that he would have to be put down unless he was prevented from boarding the trains, or had his fares paid. This news spurred many of the sailors and locals to write to the Navy, pleading for something to be done. Although somebody offered to buy him a season ticket, naval command instead decided to enlist him by the book. As a member of the armed forces, he was entitled to free rail travel. And, for the next few years, he became a morale booster and mascot for the troops serving in World War II.



Dias Beach below Cape Point, one of Cape Town's best-kept secrets.

SAFETY TIPS FOR HIKERS

1. Never hike alone. Always hike in groups of at least four.
2. Choose your route carefully and stick to it. Allow yourself enough time; start early.
3. Stick to well-used paths. If lost, don't split up. Rather try to retrace your steps.
4. Inform someone of your route and what time you're expected back.
5. Always have a fully charged mobile phone.
6. Save local emergency numbers as contacts on your phone.
7. Take sun protection, hat, sunscreen. Plus water and energy bars.
8. Take a waterproof jacket, especially if hiking in winter.
9. Sturdy hiking boots, ankle-high, are the best protection against snake bite and scorpion stings.

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