

ALOE TRAIL

The Aloe trail comprises of two trails one of 2 km marked with yellow arrows and a longer one of 7 km (3 hours) marked with red arrows. Both start at a gate at the top of **Tipplers Creek Road** between **Amsterdamhoek** and **Bluewater Bay**. The trail takes a circular route via the escarpment overlooking **Amsterdamhoek** returning through **valley bushveld** on the plateau. Amsterdamhoek, is named after a Dutch man-of-war, the Amsterdam, which ran aground near the mouth of the river on 16 December 1817. The walks are suitable for reasonably fit persons, who are advised to walk in a group, wear stout shoes and take a sunhat and drinking-water. **NO DOGS** are allowed.

The dense, stunted vegetation known as **valley bushveld** seen along the trail has adapted to the arid climate combined with the shallow clay soils on top of calcareous sandstone. **Aloes**, especially *A. pluridens*, at the start of the trail make a stunning show when in flower during June/July and attract many **sunbirds**.

Views from the top of the escarpment are excellent where the lower reaches of the **Zwartkops estuary**, a major recreational area can be seen. Estuaries are amongst the most productive ecosystems on earth where **saltmarsh** vegetation provides food for **mudprawn** and other invertebrates living in the intertidal mudbanks, these animals in turn provide a food source for birds and fish. There is also a good view upstream to **Redhouse**, the **Zwartkops Nature Reserve**, saltpan and beyond to **Uitenhage** and **Cockscomb**, the source of the river.

The trail in places follows old game-tracks worn down several centimeters below the level of the surrounding ground, over the centuries, by the passing animals. Note how the removal of the valley bushveld binding the clay slopes caused widespread erosion and also how the vegetation has adapted to withstand the dry conditions, different species storing water in leaves, stems or underground bulbs. Other plants have tough, leathery leaves that do not lose much moisture, and many have thorns to protect them from grazing animals. **Grysbok** are common, whereas **bushpig** and the rare **blue duiker** are seldom seen. Formerly this bush supported many game animals, including elephant. The only remaining evidence of the presence of these large mammals are well-worn **game tracks** and the old **wallows**. The trail passes through a series of these wallows which can be seen as bush-free depressions that hold water after good rains.

NOTE: USE OF THE AREA IS ENTIRELY AT YOUR OWN RISK