

IN THIS ISSUE:

- **Magical Journeys by Mark Hennessy Andes** guide in Peru. Mark says: 'A journey implies moving. Not only physically but intellectually and spiritually.'
- **Mr Simphiwo Wiseman Mdledle**, traditional leader of Mnyameni, believes the rainbow indicates new horizons of sustainable development for his people.
- **Mimetes stokoei** by mapmaker and author **Peter Slingsby**. This spectacular plant disappeared for over 50 years and was assumed extinct. The resurrection of **Mimetes stokoei** is the result of the uncanny relationship many Fynbos species have with ants. Spiritual stuff indeed.
- **How many stars can we see?** **Johan Retief Hermanus Astronomy Centre**. This is our first of many astronomy features. An Indian professor in mathematics suggested that if we are able tune into the Universe, it will conspire in our favour. Joining HAC will introduce you to the spiritual origins of our universe..
- **Transforming mapmaking.** **Peter Slingsby**. Good maps are part of your information system. Foreign tourists understand and love quality maps. The most frequently asked question by tour guides stopping at the Napier tourism office? How far to Cape Agulhas?

FGASA AFRITRACKS NEWSLETTER



MAY 2012

Introduction : Louis Willemse

Our transformation theme triggered many creative responses with the common suggestion we transform our guiding philosophy to provide our clients with an holistic or all-encompassing experience. Grant Hine wrote an article for the recent Field News on the need for spiritual connection with Nature. All very exciting.

The less imaginative would like to know how one can be trained in this new art and whether we will receive credits for the 'qualification.' The most effective training is generated by discussion with like-minded people and independent research. Who cares about the qualification? Leave that to the client who will employ and remunerate you well if you meet expectation.

To encourage further discussion I produced this paragraph of the aims of guiding:

The Aims of Guiding:

Unveil and interpret the wonders of our natural and cultural heritage to our valued clients while ensuring their safety, enjoyment, education and spiritual reconnection with the universe.

This is a tall order. I look forward to your comments and articles.

TOURING – SITE COLLECTING OR EXPERIENCING?

By : Mark Hennessy

Often as I walk along the main road between Willka T'ika, our garden guest house in the Peruvian Andes, and the nearby town of Urubamba the tourist buses come racing past, doing their one-day-rush through the Sacred Valley of the Inka, or speeding from the Machu Picchu train to the hotels in Cusco. I am always struck by the thought of how all those people staring out through the windows have no idea of what they are missing. At the end of the day they will have 'done the Sacred Valley - tick'. They will not have had time at PISAQ to admire the flow of the agricultural terraces, essentially feats of exceptional agricultural engineering, as they grace the curves of the mountain and add to their beauty. They would not have had time to wonder about the people who had built and managed them, and how it was that they never failed to harmonise the need for practical utility with the aesthetic magnificence of the mountains in which they lived and worked.

As I was once told by an excellent guide 'The Inka dressed the Mountains' . Would the bus people have had the time to think of what we may have been able to learn from these people and wonder about how much we, the people of today, have lost through the destruction of their knowledge?

In their scurry through the valley, they would not have met any of the local people except as vendors of curios, water, sunscreen, and 'maybe alpaca' knit-ware. They would not have had a chance to visit any of their homes or walk through the fields that they cultivate. They would not know of how the intricate web of canals stretching back to glacial lakes bring water to each household in the valley and how the existence of those glaciers are the literal life-blood of the valley communities. They will not know ... They will not know...



They will of course have done their trip to Machu Picchu, and nowadays, since it has been put on the list of 'Wonders of the World', been able to tick off a box. But will they have had time to wonder at and absorb the incredible beauty of the place and its spirit, or would they have been too busy taking photographs? Would their minds have been whirling pools of questions, theories and speculations about who built it, for what purpose and why there, rather than being free and quiet to receive what it had to offer right then in the 'here and now'? Surely the real meaning of Machu Picchu was, is and always will lie in the affect that each individual is left with if allowed to penetrate the layers of mental and physical activity?

Then there was the lady who, when we sat after having had a rest break in the Botswana Kalahari watching a dung beetle at work, informed us that she 'hadn't come ten thousand miles to watch a stupid bug.' There was no sense of wonder about this incredible little creature and its ability and dogged persistence as it gathered its ever increasing ball of treasure and navigated it through its micro-mountainous terrain to its chosen destination. There was no sense that perhaps this little creature could teach us something about ourselves and our own lives and how we conduct them that was far greater than was to be gained from, say, sitting with cameras clicking watching a bunch of lions sleeping in the sun.

How do we make a tour an experience?

Our company is called Magical Journey, and we strive to live up to the full meaning of both the words in that name.

A **Journey** implies moving not only physically but intellectually and spiritually, from where we set out to a new place. And even if the Journey brings us back to the same physical location and places us among the same people that we left behind at the start, nothing is the same because, if we have truly journeyed, we are not the same. We have broadened and incorporated more into who we are.

For something to be **Magical** it must induce in us a sense of wonder. How can that be difficult when nature, the universe and everything about and in it, everything – manifest and hidden, including ourselves, our inner and outer consciousness, our physical and spiritual being, are wondrous and become, to the open mind, even more so the more we learn about it? To introduce Magic into a Journey all we need do is help people strip away the cataract like layers that the dross of daily living and familiarity have layered over their inner eyes. In its simplicity, this may not be so easy to do, as it depends on their own

"Our company is called Magical Journey, and we strive to live up to the full meaning of both the words in that name."

openness, curiosity and attitudes. Our role is to act as the catalyst to the process by adding the spice of interesting content, depth and unexpected dimensions and, where we can, showing how that can all be relevant to their day-to-day lives when they return to them.

The first principle that we endeavour to apply in our programs is to take heed of Lao Tse's admonition in the Tao te Ching that 'Busyness is the greatest evil.' People must have time to absorb what they have seen, learned and experienced and what those have meant to them in their own inner and outer lives and attitudes. One doesn't need to make a big issue of this process; all that is needed is for there to be sufficient 'quiet time' in the programme, in the correct environment to allow this process to take place naturally. Of course the programme itself must provide enough depth of information and experience to be of value, and not just be a surface skim across the countryside.

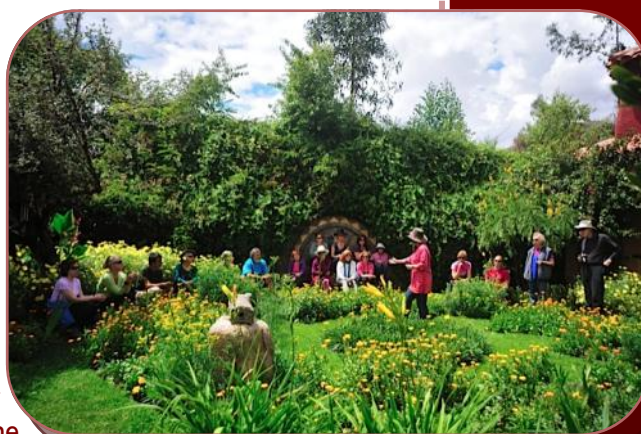
In Peru, we achieve the time for this process by basing our Journey at our garden retreat, Willka T'ika, which is centrally located to all the main sites of the Sacred Valley and convenient to both Cusco and Machu Picchu. This ensures that we always have plenty of time at the sites themselves, as well as time both before and after outings, to be spent quietly and at leisure, immersed in the beautiful gardens, or under the magnificent southern night sky. We also take care to try to avoid the largely predictable rush times at the various sites.

In other countries where we do not have the same privilege of a convenient venue under our own control, we strive to achieve the same results by adhering to the same principles through the programming and the careful selection of locations.

The second principle that we apply is to provide depth to the content so that people understand what it is they are seeing and what it can mean to them. For example, in South Africa we start each programme with a 45-minute review of the history of the region and its peoples starting with the emergence of mankind right through today. Without that they would see, but be blind to the unique blend of humanity through which they were moving. They would be deaf to the richness of language and accent in which they are immersed. To them, immediately, at the very start of the Journey, a casual walk down a street or an interaction with a waiter becomes an experience with depth and dimension which without that introduction, would have meant nothing.

In Peru, we introduce our guests to both the known 'factual' history as well as the mythological history of the people that has informed the evolution of their society, its belief system and culture through thousands of years and that lives on in today's practices.

We explain the unique cosmology of the Andean people, a cosmology that has led to the social practices and norms that have allowed an agricultural people to flourish over the millennia in the harshest of environments between 3000 and 5000 metres above sea level. We also show how the symbolism of this cosmology can be as applicable to our daily modern lives as it is to the Andean people both ancient and modern.



"Our role is to act as the catalyst to the process by adding the spice of interesting content."

"People must have time to absorb what they have seen, learned and experienced and what those have meant to them in their own inner and outer lives and attitudes."

“The story is the message.”



Our guests interact on a daily basis with our staff who are all drawn from the surrounding farming community. They are our neighbours, and the guests visit their homes and walk through their real modern day community as opposed to a cultural village set up for tourism. They experience at first hand their natural hospitality, generosity of spirit and sense of community.

Our guests meet and interact with a practicing healer who has trekked down from his community at 4500 metres to meet with them. They participate with him in a ceremony as practiced in his community to connect with the energies that control their mountain lives. They have the opportunity to participate with him in a personal Coca leaf reading. I know of no one who has not found themselves deeply affected by interaction with this humble, apparently simple and humorous man of the mountains.

One cannot introduce others to wonder unless you yourself are open to the wondrous in your environment. It doesn't take much time, just consciousness of the added dimensions of what you are seeing and experiencing and introducing those to your audience. We are therefore careful that the guides we use are such people, people who are passionate and enthusiastic about what they have to offer – story-tellers who can convey their messages with sincerity and colour giving them life, spirit and soul. A frieze in an Indian temple remains just a set of carved images until they spring to life as a gifted story-teller breathes spirit into them through relating the underlying legend.

One of our friends in Nepal is a Buddhist scholar of note but, being a quiet and diffident person by nature, was reluctant to relate Tibetan Buddhism through the stories symbolic of its beliefs. Once he saw the affect and understanding that telling Buddhism's stories brought to his audience, he shrugged off his reluctance and has inspired all of our guests with the precepts of that great body of thought.

The story is the message.

“Provide depth to the content so that people understand what it is they are seeing and what it can mean to them. “



So have we been successful in turning tours into Journeys, of helping bringing magic and increased spiritual depth into people's lives?

We sincerely hope so because that is what our objective has always been and the number of people who have attested to the value that their Magical Journey has had in their lives suggests that we have not failed.

TRADITIONAL LEADER OF MNYAMENI

Mr Simphiwo Wiseman Mdledle

The community residing here belongs to the amaBhele clan, Imbutho division of the great amaBhele tribe.

In July 1835 this group left Gaga - Alice eastwards through Amathole mountain range. At Bukazana they were engulfed by heavy snow falls. Macala Ngwena one of the greatest councillors ran back to Gaga to fetch fire in order to save chief Mdledle and his people.

Using kindled dry cow dung he managed to bring fire.

They crossed the uppermost bank of the Wolf River and climbed the horizon. As it was clearing they identified the spot where they were to build their Great Place. The glorious rainbow was encircling the area.

They had reached their destination. There they built residence for the great one chief Mdledle and secured it from all angles. Hence they called the whole area

“EMNYAMENI- PLACE OF THE RAINBOW, KOMKHULU - residence for the great one, eMBUTHWENI” - indicating the traditional house to which they belong.

This home has withstood the test of time and its dynasty remains unshaken.



“EMNYAMENI-
PLACE OF THE
RAINBOW,
KOMKHULU -
residence for the
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GETTING LOST IS PART OF THE JOURNEY!

By: Riek Basson

About a year and a half ago I was privileged enough to be invited to visit Louis and his Cata students in the Amatola mountains for a week. But just before I met up with them, something magical happened to me: I got hopelessly lost!

After the tar roads ended and my GPS only showed a question mark, I decided to follow Louis’s “WORD FOR WORD” instructions and a little bit of my own logic - which was a mistake. After about an hour I knew for a fact that I was heading in the wrong direction, but for some reason I did not mind! I found the most amazing little villages and a beautiful type of missionary school in the middle of nowhere and after the 3rd phone call to tell Louis what I was finding I turned around. Then I went past the turn-off again for another hour in the opposite direction and “accidentally” ended up next to Mnyameni dam. Were it not for the setting sun I would have definitely not met up with them for a little while longer. I experienced something that day which changed the way I travel. The most amazing feeling in the world was not expecting this stunning secret place and a huge dam and suddenly driving over a ridge and almost ending up in it. It felt like I was the first person in the world to ever see this and that I could name it . . . and secretly in my heart, I did! There is truly something magical at Mnyameni. So next time you are on holiday, I invite you to turn off your phone and GPS and **find yourself by getting lost!**

THE GOLDEN PROTEA : A TALE OF LOST AND FOUND

By: Peter Slingsby



T.P. Stokoe with two blooms he picked in 1943, for a botanical artist.

Thomas P. Stokoe [rhymes with “loco”] was a lithographer and wannabe-artist who came to the Cape from England in 1911, at the age of 43. A rather strange and eccentric man, he rapidly became interested in the Cape flora, and before long he was well-known as a mountaineer and plant-collector. He ‘discovered’ nearly two hundred plants previously unknown to science, and more than thirty of these are named after him. He had a remarkable eye for ‘new’ and strange-looking plants, and the botanical name for those species that are named after him, *stokoei*, is best pronounced to rhyme with ‘loco-eye’.

In 1922 Stokoe had an extraordinarily successful year, discovering dozens of prominent and beautiful fynbos species, some of which are today amongst the most important and valuable exported Cape wild-flowers. Amongst these many beauties he stumbled upon a single specimen of the most beautiful – and rarest – of them all.

Stokoe didn’t yet know it was rare – but he could see that it was a spectacular find. Tall, with large, pointed leaves of purest, shimmering silver, the golden flowerheads peeked out from between leaves that had transformed from silver to pink and coppery-gold. He picked two stems – one in flower and one in bud – and hurried home with them. For the rest of his life he referred to these astonishing beauties as his “Golden proteas”. He sent them to Dr E. P. Philips of the National Herbarium, in Pretoria, for identification. Philips confirmed that the plant was a previously-unknown member of the protea family, and he named it *Mimetes stokoei*.

By 1925 Stokoe had been directed to a few more plants by local flower-poachers; he was to see a few in flower in that year and in 1943, but by 1949 successive fires and new generations of seedlings had left just one plant in flower, which Stokoe captured in the only colour photo ever taken of the species up to that time. It died in 1950; Stokoe himself lived on for nine more years, climbing his last mountain at the amazing age of 91 before he died, in April 1959. No more ‘Golden proteas’ were seen until 1967, when a single seedling appeared in a patch of disturbed ground. It died without flowering; in the entire 20th century only nine plants in flower were ever found.

Most fynbos plants are regenerated by veld fires; the habitat of *Mimetes stokoei* was burned in 1971 and again in 1984, but despite thorough searches no new plants appeared. Botanists reluctantly admitted that this, the rarest protea ever discovered, was extinct. It was duly recorded as “Extinct” in the International Red Data Book of 1999. Stokoe’s ‘Golden protea’ had gone forever.

But had it *really* gone?

In 1981 the mystery of how a large number of fynbos plants store their seeds between fires was solved. These plants produce seeds that are hard nuts wrapped in a sweet, fleshy covering that some kinds of ants are literally nuts over. As the ripe seeds fall the ants frantically collect them and drag them up to fifty metres to their nests. There they chew off the fleshy covering but

with their tiny jaws they can't pick up the hard, smooth little nuts that are left. The nuts remain buried in the ants' nests, safe from predators, and waiting for the right kind of fire to trigger germination.

Stokoe's 'Golden protea' is a *Mimetes* – one of the genera of protea that rely upon ants to distribute and bury their seeds. In December 1999, the very year in which *Mimetes stokoei* was declared officially extinct, and fifty years and three fires since the last known flowering of the species, a veld fire stoked by a hot, blustery wind swept through the area. Much of the vegetation was summer-dry, 28-year old veld. Against all known odds, a year later a tiny patch of twenty-four seedlings appeared. Eventually three small groups of plants were found, and about eighteen reached maturity, setting seed each year for several years.

The plants are rapid-growing, tall with few stems; they are short-lived, too, and within ten years most of the new generation had died. Nevertheless, together they produced several hundred flowerheads and – who knows? – several hundred seeds. The first decade of the new millennium had produced many times more flowering plants – and seeds – than the entire 20th century.

How had the ant-buried seeds of the older generations survived so many fires without germinating? It stands to reason that not all the seeds buried in a nest are buried at the same depth. Those in shallower soil might germinate after quite a 'cool' fire, ie one where the burning vegetation is not very old or dense. Seeds buried at a greater depth might need a much hotter fire for the heat to penetrate the soil and so crack the hard shells of the nuts. Such seeds might be hundreds of years old.

Recent studies at Kew Gardens have shown that 200-year old protea seed, similar to the *Mimetes* nuts, can still be germinated. In short, we have no idea how long *Mimetes* seed can remain buried and still be viable.

After another fire in 2010 more than sixty new seedlings of Stokoe's 'Golden protea' have appeared. It seems that as long as its lonely mountain habitat can be protected against destructive change, this rarest and loveliest protea of them all could hang in there for literally thousands of years ...

Footnote: Stokoe called his rare beauty the 'Golden protea'. The recent Protea Atlassing project invented the common name 'pagoda' for the genus *Mimetes*. A newly-discovered plant, *Mimetes chrysanthus*, was given the common name 'Golden pagoda', while Stokoe's plant, thought to be extinct, was given the most inappropriate name, 'Mace pagoda'. Anything less like a heavy wooden mace would be hard to find! – so we prefer Stokoe's own common name, the 'Golden protea'.



“Stokoe’s ‘Golden protea’ is a *Mimetes* – one of the genera of protea that rely upon ants to distribute and bury their seeds.”

“In December 1999, *Mimetes stokoei* was declared officially extinct.”

Stokoe’s ‘Golden protea’, in 2007.

OF THE STARS THAT WE SEE

By: Johan Retief

Sitting on the stoep in on the outskirts of our village in the evening, one cannot but marvel at the beauty of our night sky. Of course, from the level of our knees, the question comes: "Grandpa, how many stars do we see?" Why the question was not directed to Grandma, we will never know, one can only surmise that from an early age little people can determine where wisdom resides! The fact that Grandma may be in the kitchen preparing the evening meal is not even considered.

The answer "many, many" is most probably correct, but should not satisfy our own curiosity and the question needs some debate.

The luminosity or brightness of stars varies enormously. The measure of a star's brightness is expressed according to a visual magnitude scale, which is too complex to explain here. Important to know: the larger the magnitude number, the dimmer the star. The Sun, the star that appears brightest to us, has a magnitude of -26, and the full Moon a magnitude of -12.5.

Sirius, in the Big Dog constellation, is the brightest star we can see in the night sky. It is assigned a magnitude of -1.44 and is a distance of 8.6 light years from us. *Sirius* is 25 times more luminous than the Sun and has a diameter of slightly more than 1½ times that of the Sun.

Alnilam, the middle star in Orion's belt is quite a lot dimmer than *Sirius*. *Alnilam* is assigned a magnitude of 1.7. *Alnilam* is, however, the most powerful bright star visible to us. It is very far away (1,300 light years), but is 375,000 times more luminous than the Sun, with a diameter more than 26 times that of the Sun.

So, stars may be dimmer than other stars because they are less luminous, or because they are just much further away from us.

In suburbia, on a dark night with no moon, one can see stars as dim as the 4th magnitude with the naked eye. In the night sky there are 22 stars of 1st magnitude and brighter, 68 of the 2nd magnitude, 197 of the 3rd magnitude and 599 of the 4th magnitude. Stars dimmer than the 4th magnitude are invisible to us. But of the 886 4th magnitude or brighter stars, only one half is visible to us at any one time, the remainder being below the horizon on the other side of the Earth. Of course, in the darkness of the African veldt, the situation is very much different and stars are visible to the 6th magnitude to the naked eye.

So, to the question "How many stars do we see?"; the wise suburban Grandpa answers; "About 440".

This photo was taken by the author and is of the constellation Orion.

The red star on the bottom right is Betelgeuse, the bright star on the top left is Rigel.



TRANSFORMING MAPMAKING

By: Peter Slingsby

Back in the day, when map-makers had given up carving everything on stone they started to use ink or paint on some kind of parchment or paper, or whatever. This technique remained basically the same for thousands of years until 1983, when the invention of the Graphical User Interface [computers to some of us], coupled to satellite photography and global positioning, simply changed everything. Everything. These days cartographers don't know which end of a pen to put the ink into; they don't draw on anything real, and, unless they're being extra-trendy, they letter everything with artistic strokes of the keyboard.

One might assume that this revolution is the be-all and end-all of the transformation of mapmaking, but one would certainly be mistaken. Despite a pile of fantastic electronic aids some absolutely awful maps are still being churned out, out there.

There are a lot of different reasons for this, but maybe the most important is a twist on the old phrase, 'familiarity breeds contempt'.

Put it this way: if you are a society that has no good maps, you learn to get by without 'em. You follow the river-courses, check the shapes of the mountains and you ask the way from strangers. If you are a society that has maps but most of them are bad, you learn to distrust your maps, and you still check with passing strangers that you're on the right track. Finally, if your education never bothered to teach you how to read maps, well, you reckon your car's GPS is good enough [and believe me, it isn't].

If you don't demand good maps, you won't get good maps. Some map-makers are quite content to trail along behind their undemanding public, contemptuously churning out maps that are sometimes not even short of dangerous. There is one, for example, which shows a walking route off Table Mountain that goes straight over the cliff-edge, descending almost vertically about 300 metres before it picks up relatively level ground. Honestly!

The real transformation still needs to come, and it needs to come in the form of public demand, in the form of people who intelligently realise the full potential of a really good map.

You've all seen the plan of a house. It's a kind of map, isn't it? Like a map, it shows a representation of the shape of the building, with all its interior detail, seen from a point in the sky above it. It's a fantastic thing that our minds are able to imagine, so successfully, what something looks like from a point vertically above it. Maybe we're more like angels than we thought! And if we can visualise the plan of our house, we can visualise the map of our territory.

It's interesting that we use the same word, 'plan', in quite a different way. We have a business plan. We have a plan to rob the bank. We're planning for our retirement, or our holiday, or our kids' education. Politicians even sometimes call their plans "road maps". What does that say? It says that the visualisation of a process really works for our human brains if we can represent it in a drawing. A plan. A map!

*"Familiarity
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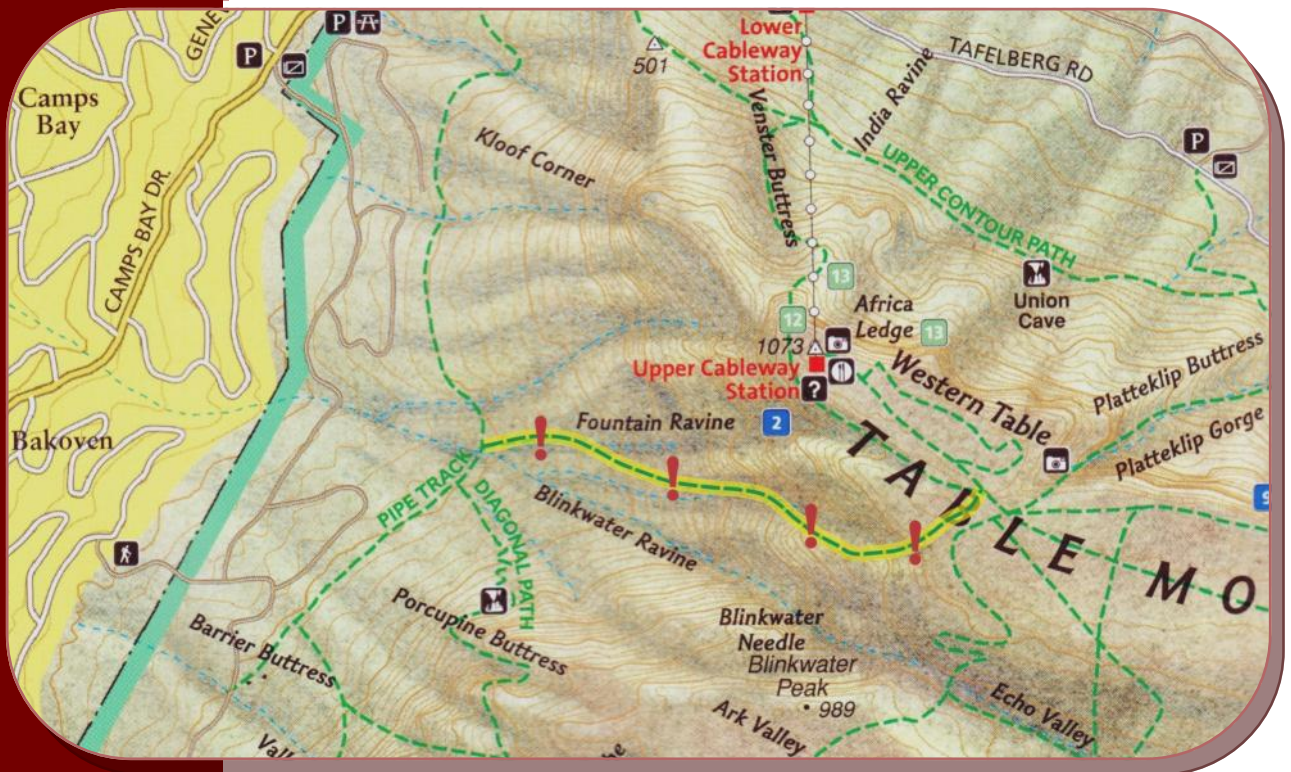
“If you walk up the mountain on the route I have highlighted with red exclamation marks, you’d be dead! If you walked down that way, you’d be even more dead!”

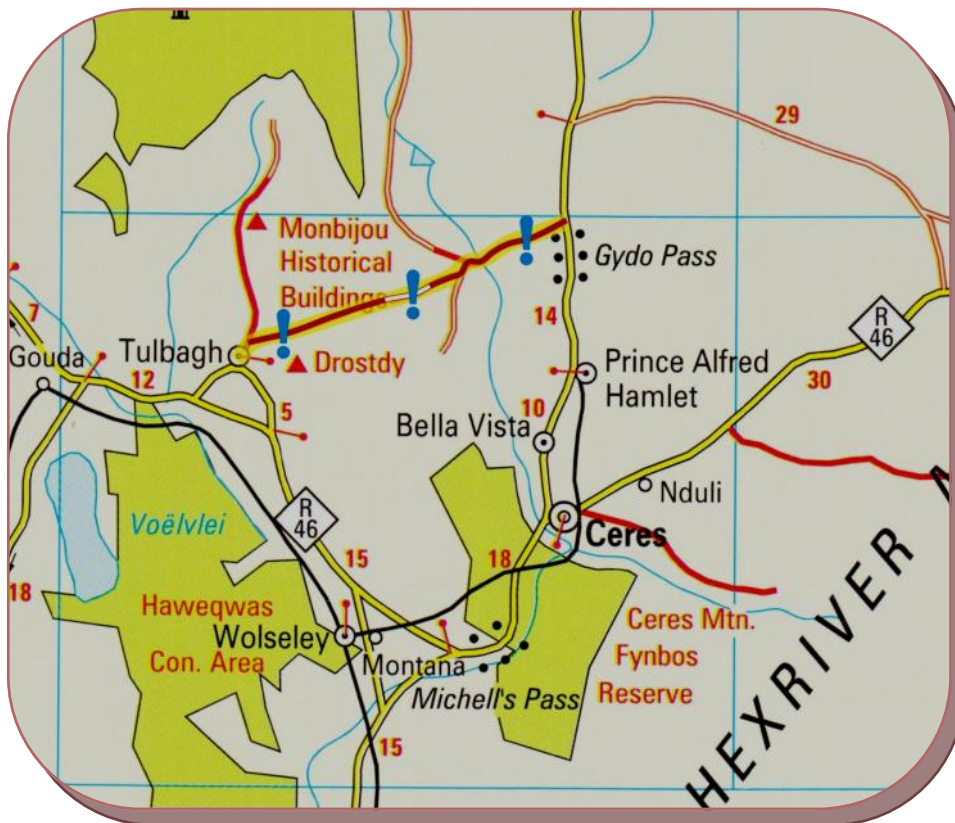
Map by National Geographic, 2004.

That’s the secret of the transformation that our mapmaking needs. If you’re a tour-guide, a map ought to be an essential tool that allows you to plan, to visualise, everything you need to do. A GPS reader doesn’t satisfy this need: it shows a tiny screen, a keyhole view of a tiny territory. It does not show you what lies behind those distant hills, across that lake, on the other side of town. Google Earth® doesn’t help you either – lots of territory with no names. Google Maps® are appallingly inaccurate! – and you can’t spread them out on your table, either.

Transforming mapmaking means, firstly, making maps that are thoroughly researched, that are as reliable as we can make them, that may well contain errors – but that will be corrected as and when new info becomes available. Secondly, but just as importantly, it means making maps that can be properly used as essential tools, tools for planning everything from a new city dam to a successful tour. I hesitate to plug my own products, but what I will say is that when Slingsby Maps publishes, you can believe that we have driven 99% of the roads on our map or, if it’s a hiking map, walked 99% of the paths. I would never claim to produce perfect maps – the more you put in, the more you might get wrong – but we do try. We don’t copy other people’s information, and we do feel, very strongly, that it’s high time that all South Africa’s map-makers adopted the same philosophy!

When that day comes, and we all know that we can pretty well rely on the info that any map contains, that will be transformation, for sure!





“If you drove the road from Tulbagh to Gydo which I have highlighted with blue exclamation marks, you’d probably be dead too!”

Map by Mapstudio, 2001

We are committed to:

- The success of our clients
- Good citizenship
- Transformation through innovation
- Integrity and Transparency
- Conservation and restoration of our natural and cultural heritage
- Sharing our knowledge, skills and experience unselfishly

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