

SWELLENDAM SURPRISE!

ALL PHOTOS BY ERIK KLEINHANS



How about a relaxing weekend getaway? As **Erik Kleinhans** discovered you don't have to drive too far, from virtually anywhere in SA, to find a town that's mad on MTB and set-up for riders to have a jol.

Swellendam is one such gem, thanks to passionate mountain biking locals like Sakkie, Wynand and Alison.

Swellendam is well known in the cycling community for its success in hosting the Double Century every November, but now they have some marked off-road routes too thanks to the Marloth Nature Reserve and some landowners in the mountains overlooking the lovely town.

Reinette and I packed our bikes and enjoyed the scenery on the easy drive from Cape Town; we were smiling from ear-to-ear when we saw the gorgeous Schoone Oordt Boutique Hotel. Even more so when we read about how Alison and Richard Walker worked tirelessly for four years to transform this lovely Cape Victorian style house into simple, stylish comfort.

On Saturday we joined the "Friends of Marloth" on their first social outside on their newly marked routes. This is an initiative to promote the active use of the Marloth

Nature Reserve for riding and hiking. There are three options for all skill and fitness levels. The 28km loop we did is a little challenging with plenty of climbing and some real MTB terrain. The focus at this time is to open routes to the public and then at a later stage more singletrack will be built. It's great to see what Sakkie, a full time farmer, with the assistance of some others are creating on the mountain!

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On Sunday we headed out to the Bontebok National Park for a slightly easier MTB outing. This is perfect for the family or if you feel like doing a simple 40km ride while searching for some Bontebok,



Erik and Reinette (in the RECM kit) joined the Friends of Marloth on their first social on the nature reserve's newly marked routes.

Cape Mountain Zebra, Red Wildebees and Grey Ribbok. They do have a dedicated MTB route, which is just a rougher jeep track, but it's still very easy for anyone to do.

We did not get there this time around, but not too far away from Swellendam is the Grootvadersbos trail network where singletrack is the name of the game. It could make for a lovely backpack tour.

One can only ride so much and apart from cycling, coffee and food is next on the list! We did not get to try all, but an absolute winner was the steak at Field and Fork with the beef straight from a local Swellendam farm. Breakfast at Schoone Oordt had us pretty

motivated to get out of bed which is normally very hard on a relaxing weekend! And our post ride coffees were enjoyed at the Old Gaol restaurant, were a warm soup made an appearance. Later we planted ourselves in the afternoon sun.

Despite all these activities and great places, we were

mostly blown away by the friendly community. All the staff we encountered were well spoken and friendly. The people of Swellendam are so proud of their town, they stand together and it is heart-warming to see. Thanks Swellendam for a stunning weekend! I Can't wait for our next visit. **fs**

Erik Kleinhans has joined the specialist marathon racing team of Topeak Ergon, but that doesn't mean you'll be hearing any less from the Lion King. Follow him on Twitter: @erikkleinhans, or visit www.topeak-ergon-racing.com.

