

CEDARVILLE 4X4 AND QUAD TRAILS, EAST GRIQUALAND

DISCOVER THE DAGGA ROUTE

Set in the foothills of the magnificent Maluti Mountains in the southern Drakensberg, Cedarberg Guest Farm is the starting point for several 4x4, quad and mountain bike trails in the area and into Lesotho and ideal for team building exercises, group functions and off-road clubs.

The Dagga Route is Gerrie Nel's (owner of Cedarberg Guest Farm) best-kept secret. The route itself is a footpath down the precipitous Drakensberg Mountains into KwaZulu-Natal that was (and still is used today by the Basotho people) as a route to transport home-grown dagga into South Africa and return with a few rustled cattle. The locals are usually quite mellow about it but several midnight raids into Lesotho have taken place on motorbike to search for stolen livestock. The Basotho move quickly however, and usually there is not a trace to be found of the missing animals. The police in the area are a bit slow on the uptake so the local Xhosa people have taken to attaching bells to the necks of their cows so they can hear if anything untoward is happening at night. However, there seems to be no animosity towards the Basotho and they wave merrily at you from their ponies, swathed in traditional blankets as you drive past.

The 4x4 trail that encompasses the driveable part of the Dagga Route takes you up into the foothills of the Drakensberg to a point called the Three Sisters, a trio of peaks that overlook a small secret valley where you can set up camp for the night if you wish. The track was originally built to service a weir that has been built in the mountains and is ideal for off-roaders wishing to test their driving skills. Suitable only for serious 4x4's, as high clearance and low range is essential, and diff-lock would be an advantage, this trail is rated as a Grade 3-5. Most of the trail is through rocky gorges and requires careful navigation. We were a convoy of three vehicles, the last in line to be a Dutch couple, Claire and Marnix, in a souped up Land Cruiser that were planning an overland trip through Africa and had approached Gerrie for some driver training. This was certainly a baptism by fire for them! But Marnix made it through without damage to the vehicle (a real possibility on this trail if not driven with care) and earned his stripes. Although Gerrie has GPS waypoints for the route, it should not be undertaken alone or by a novice driver and recovery equipment is a good idea to take along. Drivers should leave early in the morning as afternoon thunderstorms in summer can bring the mountain streams down in flood. There are however cellphone comms in the mountains if anything should go wrong and Mary-Ann Nel will pack you a lunch to take with you so you won't be without provisions!

Gerrie also runs 4x4 trails into Lesotho. This is Adam Kok country and one of the passes in the area is named after an incident that killed his ox wagon driver and is now known as Ongeluksnek. Round trips taking in the Khatse Dam, the Orange River and Sani Pass are popular as well as trails into the Eastern Cape to Rhodes and Tiffendell. The maximum number of vehicles permitted is ten. These routes should prove especially popular in winter when the Southern Berg is clothed in snow.

Cedarberg Guest Farm, the hub of all this adventure, is situated just over three hours from Durban on the Matatiele road. The farm, which is 900 hectares, has its own set of off-road trails Grade 2-3 including the Cedarberg Scenic, which takes in several neighbouring farms. These trails are also suited to soft-roaders although they can get quite tricky after rain. You can choose the catered or self-catering option and there is a separate mini farmhouse a few kays away from the main farmstead for those who wish for total privacy. However it would be a shame to visit without sampling Mary-Ann's delicious farm cooking. The cottages all have DSTV and are equipped with kitchenettes and heaters. There are also 12 electrified camping sites available on the lawns beside a small dam and a rustic farm shed is used to cater for large groups and functions such as weddings and the local Cedarville Red Meat Festival which is held towards the end of April.

Birding is excellent in the area and crowned, blue and wattled cranes are all to be found on the nearby vleis. For the twitchers, Rudd's lark is the most sought after special of the area. Hunting can also be arranged on the farm and blesbok, red hartebeest, zebra, common and mountain reedbuck, vaal rhibbok and oribi are all available. Wingshooting is also popular in the region and Gerrie's son, Fritz is in charge of that department. There are also San paintings in the area, the remains of which can be found on the Dagga Route Trail. Walking trails may be undertaken in the foothills and there are several mountain bike trails.

East Griqualand is not as popular as the north and central Berg and has much to offer the mountain junkie. This undiscovered piece of paradise will not fail to capture your imagination. Book now!

TRAVEL PLANNER

WHAT IT COSTS

Self-catering – R300,00 per night out of season. More than 4 people R70,00 per person extra. In season R350,00 per night and R80,00 per person for more than 4. Bed and breakfast R180,00. Dinner, bed and breakfast R200,00 single, sharing R220,00. Caravan and camping R25,00 per person per night.

WHERE TO BOOK

Gerrie and Mary-Ann Nel Tel/Fax: (039) 757 5535, Cell: 083 262 5464, 083 468 9597, e-mail: gerrie@futurenet.co.za, website: www.wheretostay.co.za/cedarberg.

GPS WAYPOINTS

Cedarberg Guest Farm is 46km west of Kokstad on the R56, turnoff from tar road is S30° 23.29; E29° 01.36. Turnoff from gravel road is S30° 25.32; E29° 00.55. Farmhouse is S30° 25.55; E29° 01.63.

LIST OF CAPTIONS

1. The cosy dining room of the main farmhouse
2. The self-catering cottage is set away from the main farmhouse
3. The cosy dining room of the main farmhouse
4. The lounge of the main farmhouse is open for guests to enjoy
5. Boys will be boys!
6. Boys will be boys!
7. The self-catering cottage at Cedarberg Guest Farm sleeps six
8. A steep descent by Gerrie
9. Marnix negotiates a rocky section of the trail
10. The bedroom of the self-catering cottages
11. The lounge of the self-catering cottage
12. The kitchenettes have all the mod cons including a microwave
13. The scenery on the Dagga Route is spectacular
14. Marnix negotiates a steep incline
15. Low range is essential for this trail
16. Two of the Three Sisters can be seen in the far right
17. The end of the Dagga Route where you can camp for the night
18. Marnix negotiates a steep incline
19. The trail down the mountain is very rocky and requires high clearance
20. A rocky patch
21. In summer these small streams can become rushing torrents
22. The scenery on the Dagga Route is spectacular
23. Claire negotiates a steep incline
24. The beginning of the Dagga Route can be seen as a small footpath over the mountains at this point
25. Negotiating a rocky donga