GATEWAY S Lion's Head Spiral Route

TAQUILA BIG 5 SAFARI & S



A walking guide to summit Lion's Head, including its interesting history, geology, flora and fauna

FREE EDITION 16

South African NATIONAL PARKS

Cape www.gatewayguides.co.za

REAL AFRICA. REAL CLOSE TO CAPE TOWN OVER 10 000-HECTARES OF BIG 5 CONSERVANCY.



ACCOMMODATION • SPA • GAME DRIVES HORSEBACK & QUAD BIKE SAFARI

At the award-winning Aquila Private Game Reserve and Spa, guests will get the opportunity to experience a Big 5 Safari, together with outstanding service. it just does not get any better than this. With game drives, quad bike and horseback safaris situated just 2 hours' drive from Cape Town it's the closest you will get to real Africa, in the lap of luxury.



FACILITIES OFFERED

PREMIER, FAMILY & LUXURY COTTAGES · LODGE ROOMS · DAY TRIP SAFARI HORSEBACK SAFARI · QUAD BIKE SAFARI · OVERNIGHT SAFARI · FLY-IN SAFARI INDOOR & OUTDOOR RESTAURANTS · OUTDOOR POOL · WET BAR CONFERENCE CENTRE · SPA · CURIO SHOP CHILDREN'S FACILITIES & JUNIOR RANGER PROGRAMME

www.aquilasafari.com 🛛 🖪 AquilaSafari 🛛 🖸 AquilaSafaris

RESERVATIONS: +27 (0)21 430 7260 or RES@AQUILASAFARI.COM

Lion's Head (Leeukop) Spiral Path • 670 metres • Trig Beacon 51

... for a memorial hereafter we have made a heap of stones on a hill lying west-south-west from the road in the said bay, and call it by the name 'King James His Mount'.

English Naval Officers, Humphrey Fitzherbert and Andrew Shillinge, issued a proclamation annexing Table Bay in the name of King James I.

staples.



The start of the Spiral Route up Lion's Head. Remember to bring *a tip for the car guard.*

Lion's Head

Lion's Head, at 670 m, is not the highest of the many peaks that make up the Cape Peninsula mountain chain, but it is a mountain in its own right (a mountain is defined as 'any peak that is over 305 m above the surrounding terrain') and an important landmark as it is one of the three iconic peaks that frame the city of Cape Town. In addition, Lion's Head stands head and shoulders above all its neighbours when one takes into consideration the number of people who climb it. It has been estimated that over 200 000 people a year reach its summit, making it the mostclimbed peak in South Africa.

Many Capetonians have walked up Lion's Head at least once in their lives, whether during the day or for the popular full-moon pilgrimage, when (along with crowds of other people) one can enjoy a picnic while watching the sun set and the full moon rise before descending by torchlight.

What makes the walk up Lion's Head so popular, we might ask? One answer is its convenience with regard to time: from the city, its slopes can be reached within ten minutes, and the summit can be reached within an hour of leaving the car park. Other important factors are that it offers breathtaking 360° views of Cape Town (one of the top ten tourist destinations in the world), has Table Mountain (one of the recently proclaimed seven natural wonders of the world) as its backdrop, and is situated in one of the smallest but richest floral kingdoms in the world.

This route should not really be described as just a 'walk', for it involves some interesting additional aspects: ladders, a chain traverse, an exposed summitridge scramble and the famous chain ladder that has just recently been upgraded to steel handles for safety reasons. There are other walking routes to the summit, but they involve serious scrambling with exposure and these routes have to use the normal summit ridge as well, shared with the standard Spiral Path route. There are numerous rock climbs to the summit but these should only be undertaken by experienced rock climbers or with a qualified guide. This Gateway guide will cover the standard 'Spiral Path' which, in its own right, is one of the most exciting walks in the Cape Peninsula.

Before we get into the description of the walk, there are layers of the geological story that need to be told to give you a fuller picture of this peak and to enrich your experience. The story of Lion's Head is shared with the rest of the Peninsula mountain chain.

A geological marvel

Atlantis

sand dune

Lion's Head is one of the few places in the world where you can walk past three different rock units and view, down by the ocean shore, a fourth one that Charles Darwin visited in 1836, on his famous journey around the world in the HMS Beagle.



Walking through the Silver Tree forest at the end of the jeep track just after the paragliding launch site.

The different rock units that you encounter on the walk up Lion's Head today are due to the changing geological environments which altered the nature of the rock type. The story starts about 560 million years ago with the extremely ancient Adamastor Ocean, in which silt was deposited (18 km thick), that became the siltstones of the Malmesbury Group, the foundation for all the rock units that we see today on Lion's Head. These dark grey siltstones can be viewed from Lion's Head when you look down at the Sea Point promenade. This stone fractures easily: on close inspection, you can see unspoilt lamination from being deposited in a lifeless, oxygenless ocean.

About 540 million years ago, the Malmesbury Group was intruded by molten magma of the Cape Granite, which forced its way into the siltstones and cooled slowly to form a granite pluton (50 km in diameter) 10 km underground. The contact zone between the massive hot magma and the country rock (in Cape Town, the Malmesbury Group) was a focal



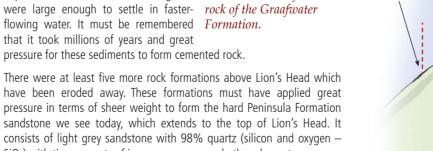
Walking along the western flank of Lion's Head, you will find a good outcrop of the Graafwater Formation just above the path on your right. Below the path (bottom left of the photo) you will see an outcrop of Cape Granite, which underlies this formation.

point of Darwin's stopover in 1836. These two different types of rock did not just sit side by side when the hot magma intruded. Folding occurred in the Malmesbury siltstone so once-horizontal beds were pushed up to become nearly vertical. The siltstone that was closest to the heat was metamorphosed, forming a tough baked rock called hornfels ('fels' meaning 'rock' in German), which is very dark grey in colour.

The intrusion of granite marked the turning point in the history of Lion's Head as, for the first time, instead of subsidence taking place, everything started to uplift.

There was a gap of about 20 million years before the sediments of the Table Mountain Group were laid down during the time of the supercontinent Gondwana. The base of the Table Mountain Group on Lion's Head is a 60 m layer of mudstone and sandstone called the Graafwater Formation, sitting on the uplifted and eroded top of the Cape Granite. The maroon colour of the mudstone is proof that the original mud was exposed to the air, causing Having fun in one of the oxidisation. This layer was probably made many little caves found in a quiet estuarine or tidal mud flat. Sand *next to the path. These* of the vounger (400-500 million years) caves were formed Peninsula Formation was probably through erosion by wind deposited in river channels, as the grains *and rain in the softer* were large enough to settle in faster- rock of the Graafwater flowing water. It must be remembered Formation. that it took millions of years and great pressure for these sediments to form cemented rock.





Paarl Rock Du Toit's Peak Koeberg Nuclear Paardeberg Hill where the Battle of Power Station Blaauwberg took place Cape Towr V&A Waterfro

SiO₂) with tiny amounts of iron, manganese and other elements.

This formation was deposited by rivers in a sinking basin to a thickness of

at least 1200 m. Over time, most of the mountain has eroded away,

leaving the bullet-hard sandstone which creates very steep terrain with vertical cliffs and overhangs. Along the Lion's Rump and Signal Hill, which

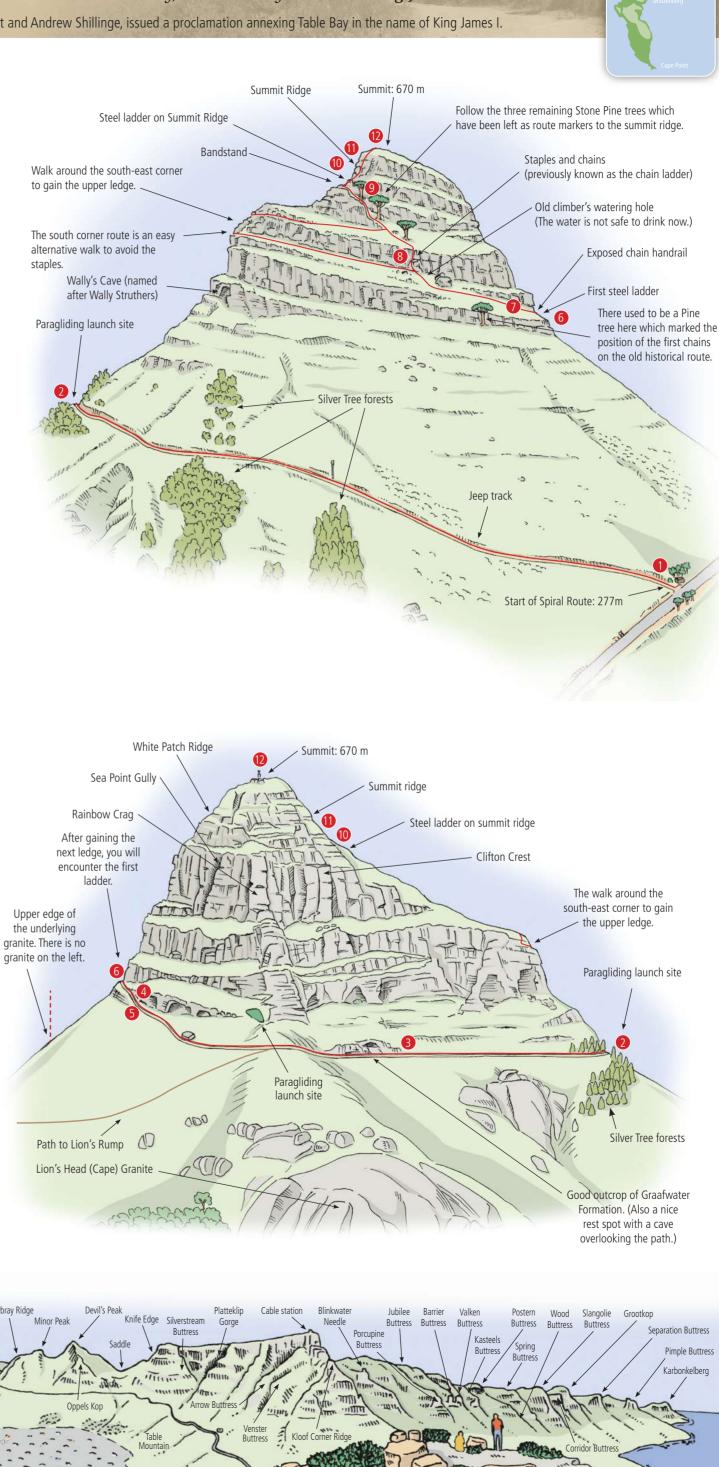
is made up of Malmesbury siltstone, this section has a rounded

appearance as siltstone is a softer rock which erodes much more quickly.

All these rock units are hundreds of millions of years old: if you are looking

for fossils, you will be disappointed as there were only very primitive

organisms lacking hard bodies at this time. If you are looking for something







Passing the north-east corner, which gives spectacular views of the City Bowl below. The upper beds of the Graafwater Formation give way to Peninsula Formation sandstone at the first ladder.

more interesting like trilobites and brachiopods, you will have to visit the Cederberg. The Cederberg Shale Formation, which once covered the present-day summit of Table Mountain, has since been eroded away.

The lion's share of the floral kingdom

Lion's Head is situated within the Cape Floral Kingdom, the smallest Floral Kingdom in the world (0.04% of the world's land surface area) but the richest in terms of species, as it boasts over 9000, of which two thirds are endemic to the Cape. The floral wealth of this area was recognised by the English naturalist William Burchell, who, after visiting Lion's Head in 1810, compared what he saw to a "botanic garden, neglected and left to grow into a state of nature; so great was the variety everywhere to be met with".

A lot of the plant life around you as you walk up Lion's Head is of a vegetation type known as fynbos. Perhaps the best-known example of fynbos is the King Protea, the national flower of South Africa. The pride of Lion's Head, however, is probably the Silver Tree, the tallest species in the Protea family. Its name derives from its silver leaves which shimmer in the sun (the silvery sheen is thought to protect the tree from heat by reflecting sunlight.) On your walk up from the car park, you will see groves on both sides of the path. These trees are on the endangered list and have, at times, come close to being lost. One of the things that has nearly destroyed the Silver Tree is also what preserves it: fire. Like all fynbos, these plants need fire at the right time and right temperature for the seeds to germinate. If fire occurs too frequently or infrequently, the plants will die. However, the groves on Lion's Head have managed to flourish in the last few years and groves on Devil's Peak and Vlakkenberg have been cultivated, so the risk of extinction has diminished. On Signal Hill another vegetation type, Renosterveld, can also be seen.

Here be lions

Thousands of years before humankind set eyes on it, Lion's Head was the domain of animals. From the first written records by visitors to the Cape and the early European settlers, we know that all the big animals like elephants, hippos, lions, hyenas and leopards were present around Cape Town in the late 1600s. The records also tell us that the last wild lion on Lion's Head was shot in 1802 and the last leopard in the 1820s. Caracal, and the extremely rare African wild cat, have managed to survive. Today, besides the rock agama, black girdled lizard, dassies and porcupines, not much else can be seen. Hopefully one day the national parks will introduce the elusive little klipspringer that once roamed these slopes.

The arrival of people

The first people to set eyes on Lion's Head, and more than likely climb its summit, were the Stone Age people who had made the Cape Peninsula their home, followed by the San and later the Khoi-Khoi, who



The first ladder before the exposed walkway with a chain handrail. This ladder crosses the lowest beds of the Peninsula Formation.

were around more than 2000 years before the first Europeans. A sketch of Table Bay by Peter Kolbe (first astronomer at the Cape from 1705-1713) shows two large Khoi-Khoi kraals situated on the slopes of Lion's Head.

The first written records began with the coming of the Europeans. Bartholomeu Dias recorded seeing Table Mountain, as well as Lion's Head, in 1488.

We do not know who the first European man to climb Lion's Head was, but it is recorded that in 1682 the wife of Ryklof van Goens (the The exposed chain handrail Governor-General of the Dutch *walkway just after the first* van der Stel, Governor of the Cape. the Peninsula Formation. To commemorate the event, a two-

East Indies) climbed it with Simon ladder, showing the thick beds of

metre-high brick pyramid was erected, but this has long since disappeared.

In the true spirit of colonisation, Lion's Head would be claimed, named, mapped, probed, dug into and built upon. The first to leave their mark were the Portuguese; instead of erecting their traditional stone cross on the summit, they hacked a large cross-shaped fissure into a rockface near the summit. This cross can still be seen today, but most believe it is natural and the story is but a legend.

What's in a name?

Disregarding any local name given to these places, the English, on 3 July 1620, supplied their own names for Lion's Head and Signal Hill. The background to this naming is guite interesting: it was part of a show of pretence to keep the Dutch from thinking they could occupy Table Bay without the English putting up some form of resistance. Two high-ranking English naval officers, Humphrey Fitzherbert and Andrew Shillinge, issued a proclamation annexing Table Bay in the name of King James I, and stating "... and for a memorial hereafter we have made a heap of stones

on a hill lying west-south-west from the road in the said bay, and call it by the name 'King James His Mount' ".Thus Lion's Head was briefly known as "King James Mount" while Signal Hill was named "Ye Sugar Loaf". The annexation by the English was never confirmed and the Dutch subsequently took control of Table Bay and the Cape, providing the names "Leeuwen Kop" (Lion's Head) and "Leeuwen Staart" (Lion's Tail), which later became Signal Hill.

Signals from the summit

The first official use of Lion's Head was in 1673 when a permanent watch station was placed on the summit. This station was manned by up to three men with a small signal cannon and a flag. The cannon would be fired whenever a ship was spotted, thus informing the castle down below. By the early 1700s, a hut had been built on Kloof Nek, then known as Vlaggeman's Kloof (Flagman's Ravine), for the use of those who manned the station.

When the old mud fort of Van Riebeeck was to be replaced by the Castle of Good Hope, Signal Hill was one of the proposed sites. As we know, the fort did not move to Signal Hill, but part of Signal Hill moved to the Castle in the form of stone cut for its foundation.

Under British occupation, a signalling station which is followed easily to the top. was built on Signal Hill in 1815, replacing the

old Dutch cannon on the top of Lion's Head. The old method of cannon fire as a signal was also replaced with a new system of a series of variously shaped flags, accompanied by a varying number of balls hoisted to the top of a flagstaff, indicating what kind of ship had been seen and where it was from.

In 1902, once again a cannon was hauled up the mountain, but this time to a lower position on Signal Hill. This large cannon gave the ships in the bay accurate time for setting their chronometers for navigational purposes; in addition, the people of Cape Town set their watches by it. The cue for the cannon to be fired was sent via a flare shot off at the Royal Observatory in Mowbray; this ritual of firing a cannon for time-keeping had started at the Castle in 1833. Today, at 12 midday, you will still hear the Noon Gun, as it is now called, booming across the city from the slopes of Signal Hill. This is the oldest continuing tradition in Cape Town and two of the oldest working cannons in the world are still used.

A place to live, die and be buried

Cape Town was virtually built on slavery like all colonial outposts. It is estimated that in 1834 there were over 35 000 slaves in the Cape. As Cape Town expanded, a small community of ex-slaves, artisans, political exiles (scholars and religious leaders) and people of mixed parentage established a home on the slopes of Signal Hill in an area which was known as the Malay Quarter, now home mainly to the descendants of the original inhabitants. (The word 'Malay' was used as a blanket term for anyone who came from the East, especially the Indonesian archipelagos.) Now known as the Bo-Kaap, with its interesting streets, traditions and unique culture, the area is well worth a visit. One of the Bo-Kaap's biggest influences was the establishment of the Islamic faith on the southern tip of Africa by one of its own, known as Tuan Guru, who is buried in the BoKaap. (Islam was first introduced to the Cape at a farm in Constantia by Sheikh Abdurahman Matebe Shah in 1668.) The Bo-Kaap is also home to the oldest mosque in the country, the Auwal mosque (1798).

A golden opportunity?

As early as 1685, a French astronomer, Father Guy Tachard, was convinced there was gold at the Cape. As things turned out, he was correct, but there was not enough to make it a viable business. Before the discovery of gold on Signal Hill in 1887 and the establishment of the Lion's Head Gold Mining Company, gold had been discovered on Table Mountain and in Camps Bay, Noordhoek and Glencairn. The spectacular view of Table Mountain and the Twelve Apostles

A shaft was dug 45 m into Signal Hill and the first results were tested at Wilkinson's Mill in Kloof Street; a ton of guartz containing pyrite produced two ounces of gold. Over seven tons were sent to Britain and Germany for authentic tests in the hope of attracting more investors, but the tests were botched, resulting in a negative for gold and thus a negative for investors. This debacle eventually forced the company to close in 1893. By 1951, the shaft had been closed for safety reasons; thus also closed the mystery of how much gold there really is on Lion's Head.

A statue too far

After the death of Cecil John Rhodes in 1902, Earl Grey, the Colonial Secretary, proposed a massive statue of Rhodes on the summit of Signal Hill, overlooking Cape Town, that would rival the statue of Christ in Rio de Janeiro and the Statue of Liberty in New York. The idea was met with horror and was quashed immediately. It was referred to as 'an extraordinary landmark ... a monstrosity, indelibly stamped on the beautiful city skyline'.



To get to the start of the Spiral Path to walk up Lion's Head, make your way up to Kloof Nek. At Kloof Nek, take the road towards the Signal Hill lookout point, about 500 m from the junction of Kloof Nek, and park under some trees, where there is a small wooden hut. A car guard will look after your car while you walk, so please remember to tip him. The start is clearly signposted. Before you undertake your walk, for safety reasons, make sure you have told someone where you are going and what time you will return. Make sure you have enough water and warm clothes: the weather in Cape Town can change in a few minutes. (Just for interest, in the winter of 1878, Lion's Head found itself under a blanket of snow.) Ideally walk with someone but, If you are alone, stay close to another group. If you are doing the full moon walk, take a torch. A cellphone is advisable. (Call 021 937 0300 to request a rescue if really necessary). Lion's Head Spiral. The route is not good for dogs!

The first part of the walk is up a gravel service road. Benches can be found every now and then. The highlights of this part of the walk are the

Silver Tree groves, views down onto Camps Bay and the breathtaking view of Table Mountain and the Twelve Apostles mountain chain. The odd thing about the name 'Twelve Apostles' is that only one peak has an apostle's name and that is Judas Peak, found near the end, overlooking Hout Bay. This part of the mountain was first called the Gable Mountains by the Dutch.

After 15 or 20 minutes, depending on how you walk, 9 the road ends and the rest of the walk is along a path. At this place, you will see the first of the paragliding launch sites (No. 2). The first paragliding flight off Lion's Head was in 1987; this followed hang gliding which started in 1973. You can book a tandem flight, if you are the adrenalin type, with one of the companies that offer this service.

The famous Lion's Head staples and chains.

This part is optional and can be bypassed by

following a level path below this to the left.

This brings you out on the south-east ridge,

From here, the path swings around the seaboard side of the mountain overlooking Clifton, home to the super-rich. The path This is where the Chain Route and the gains height and then easier South-East Corner Route join. plateaus out. At this point,



Ian Appleton in the mid-1960s.

Zone

Paragliding

aunch site

Cliftor

section of the walk.



Passing the highest of the Stone Pine

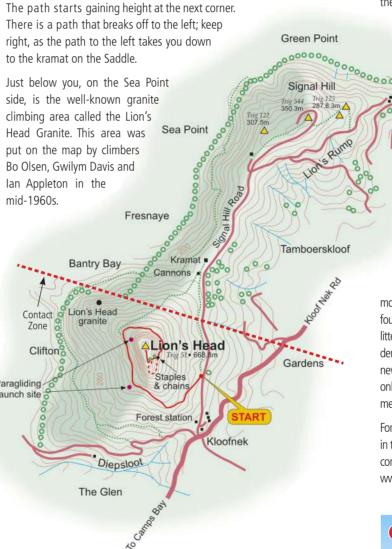
south-east ridge before the summit.

trees, just before you gain the top of the



you are on the transition zone between the granite under your feet and the Graafwater Formation on your right (No. 3). This is a nice little rest stop where there are caves that can be visited above the path.

While taking a rest, look down at the rocks by the sea; on your right, at Sea Point, the rocks are a dark grey – these rocks are Malmesbury Group siltsone. Follow the coast on your left with your eye till you get to a point where the land juts out into the sea. Where Sea Point ends and Bantry Bay starts, you will notice that all the rocks at sea level have now changed to light grey granite. This change of rock types marks the famous contact zone which runs all the way up to just left of Lion's Head, through the Saddle on Devil's Peak and out into False Bay.



Rock climbing on the sandstone layers above you became popular in the 50s and 60s; the attraction for climbing here is the quick walk up, which makes after-work climbing possible. The other attraction is that you can climb in the shade throughout the day by moving to the other side of the mountain.

The path gains more height

on the ridge before you get

on to the City Bowl side of

Lion's Head (No. 5). During

the 1980s and before, the

path did not jump up to the

next grass band here, but

traversed horizontally around

to above the starting point.

There was a chain section to

be negotiated which linked

up with the new path by the

From this point, things start

getting interesting: a short

steel ladder is climbed (No. 6)

to access a higher grass band.

A traverse, which is a bit

exposed, is negotiated by

means of a chain handrail

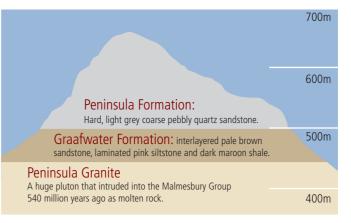
(No. 7). Walk off to the left

until you are under the

chain ladder (No. 8).



Looking up the summit ridge from the bandstand. About 150 m up the ridge and one more ladder takes you to the summit. Take care in the dark or on windy days as it is the most exposed



famous chain ladder (No. 8). The original chains were put in by three blacksmiths by the names of Penryn, Hellings and Welsh in 1881, while they were working on the Robinson Dry Dock. The 1990s saw little nubbins added for footholds, as the natural footholds had become highly polished and dangerous. With the great increase in traffic and accidents, Dion Tromp and his crew from High Angle Rescue and Access, installed steel staples (handles) in 2010, making it a lot safer to climb.

At this point, you can make a decision to go up the chains or take the longer, safer option which is a path that goes out left. The South-Eastern Corner Route has no scrambles. These two paths join up again by the second Stone Pine tree (No. 9). At one time, the whole of Lion's Head was covered in these Stone Pines (*Pinus pinea*) which are not indigenous to the Cape, but come from the Mediterranean. They are also known as Italian Stone Pine and Umbrella Pine. Three Stone Pines still stand as markers to show the way up. (Around 1906, Sir David Hutchins, one of the founders of the Forestry Department, in a misguided exercise, encouraged members of the Mountain Club and other walkers and climbers to fill their pockets with hardy foreign seeds and sow them all over the mountains of the Cape.)

> Above the last Pine tree, the summit ridge is reached. Take care along this ridge which involves one steel ladder and some exposed scrambling. The summit should be reached in a few minutes: a breathtaking 360° view of Cape Town and beyond should greet you. When descending the mountain, it is advisable to use the safer South-Eastern

Corner Route, especially if you are doing the fullmoon walk

Bo-Kaa

Enjoy your walk but leave the mountain in the state in which you found it: remember to take all your litter with you and stay on the demarcated paths as creating new paths will cause erosion. Take only photographs and great memories with you.

For those who want to be involved in the conservation of Lion's Head, contact Friends of Lion's Head at www.friendsoflionshead.org



Highest ladder on the summit ridge.



Magnificent views from the summit of Lion's Head at 667 m.

For More Information

Rock Climbing

Climb some of the classic routes on Lion's Head. Mobile: +27 (0)83 683 1876

Friends of Lion's Head A group that is dedicated to anything that is Lion's Head visit www.friendsoflionshead.org

Editing: Shelley Brown and Shelley Woode-Smith

Thanks to John Rogers for assistance with the geological section. © Richard Smith • 16th edition, 2023 • Gateway Guides

Let our advertisers know you found them at Gateway Guides.



To advertise contact Clifford Smith: 082 728 4229 • cliff@gatewayguides.co.za