



LIONS HEAD



Cape Town's Timeless Gem: In the Shadow of the Lion

"Botanic Garden, neglected and left to grow into a state of nature, so great was the variety everywhere to be met with"

said William Burchell (English naturalist)

Lion's Head, a crown jewel in the heart of the Motherland, stands as an iconic sentinel overlooking Cape Town, South Africa.

This awe-inspiring peak is a hiker's paradise and a symbol of the city's rich heritage and breathtaking landscapes.

With its distinctive silhouette and panoramic views, Lion's Head offers an unforgettable experience for adventure seekers, nature lovers, and anyone searching for tranquillity amid spectacular beauty. Join us as we embark on a journey to discover the unparalleled allure of Lion's Head.



From Legend to Legacy: The Majesty of Lion's Head

Lion's Head is not merely a mountain but a living testament to Cape Town's rich history. From its origins as a navigational landmark to its significance in indigenous culture, the mountain's past is intertwined with the city's story. As we hike its trails and gaze upon its iconic shape, we experience its natural grandeur and pay homage to the generations of people and explorers captivated by its enduring allure. Lion's Head is a timeless chapter in Cape Town's history, one that continues to be written by each person who visits and is moved by its majestic beauty.

Initially, the Cape Peninsula was inhabited by Stone Age people, followed by the San and later the Khoi Khoi, who settled more than 2000 years before the arrival of the first Europeans. The European presence was first documented in 1488 when Bartolomeu Dias noted the sight of Table Mountain and Lion's Head. The first European ascent of Lion's Head in 1682 is attributed to the wife of Ryklof van Goens, the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies, and Simon van der Stel, the Governor of the Cape.

In 1673, a permanent watch station on Lion's Head was established, manned by watchmen whose task it was to fire a small cannon whenever they spotted sails on the horizon. This served as an early warning system for the Dutch inhabitants of the castle, telling them that a ship was approaching. By the early 1700s, a hut was built on Kloof Nek for the station's personnel. In 1815, when the British ruled, they built a signalling station on Signal Hill that replaced the old Dutch cannon on Lion's Head.

In 1902, a cannon was again placed on Signal Hill and fired every day at noon, providing accurate time checks for ships in the bay and the people of Cape Town. This timekeeping tradition, initiated in 1833 at the castle, continues to this day, with the noon gun booming from Signal Hill, daily.

Did you know?

There are only a handful of locations worldwide where you can stroll past **three distinct rock formations** and observe **a fourth one** along the ocean shore.

Temporary Renamings: Ye Sugar-Loaf and King James His Mount

Lion's Head Mountain Peak lies between Table Mountain and Signal Hill in Cape Town. These mountains have stood guard over Table Bay for eons, long before 1652 when Jan van Riebeeck landed at the Bay. They have witnessed the trading ships sailing to and from the Far East. Before and during this time, the local indigenous peoples called Table Mountain "Hoerikwagga" - or "Sea Mountain." For the Khoi-San, Lion's Head held spiritual significance, with various legends and stories passed down through generations. It was seen as a place where the earthly and the divine converged.

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The Portuguese explorer Antonio da Saldanha sailed into the future Table Bay in the 16th century and, impressed by the flat-topped mountain and its peaks, decided

to name it "Table Mountain". One of the reasons he named it may have been that, in those days, the seafarers needed descriptive names to assist them with navigation and communication. Table Mountain would have been a logical choice of name.

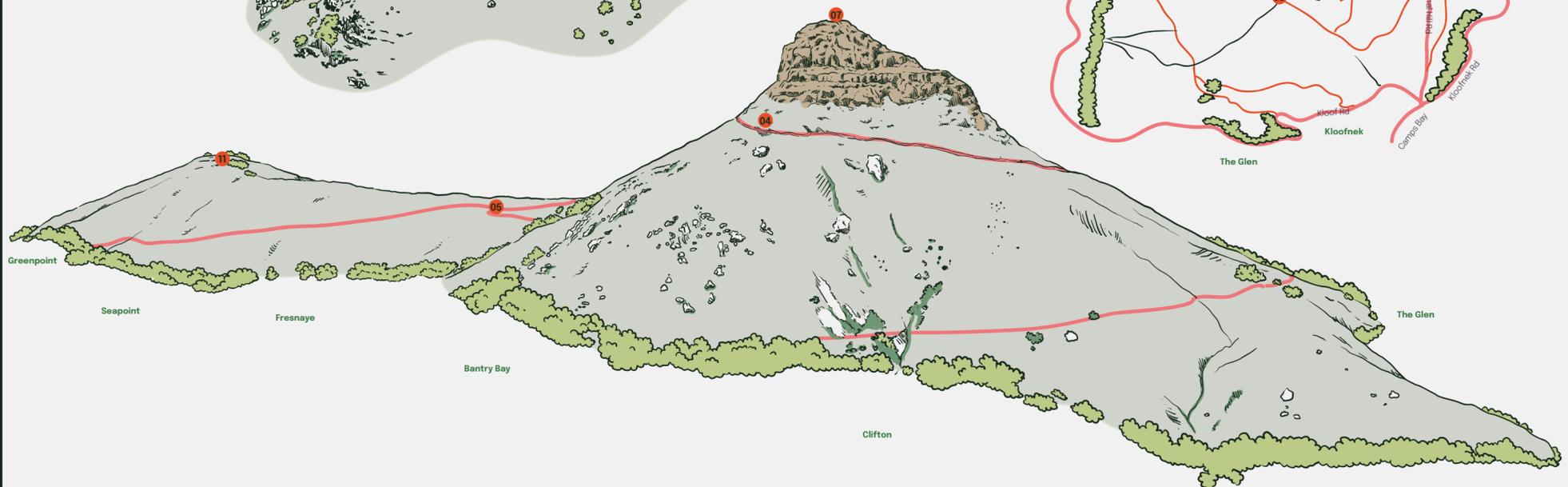
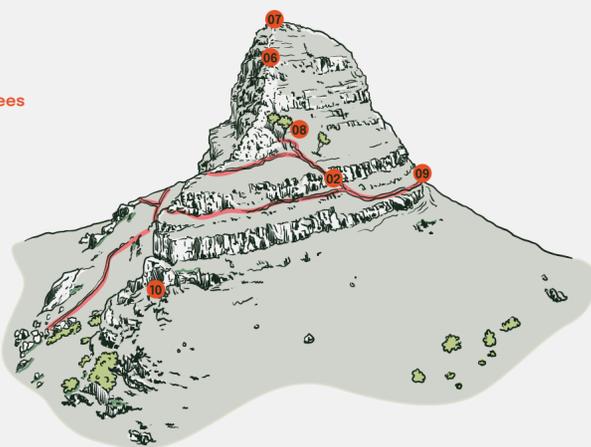
How Lion's Head originally got its name has been something of a mystery for about 300 years. In 1620, two Englishmen, Humphrey Fitzherbert and Andrew Shillinge, who worked for the English East India Company, arrived in the Cape en route to the Far East. The English, Dutch, and French were in fierce competition to dominate the Far East trade, and all viewed the Cape as a perfect maritime stopover because of its location. The two men took possession of Table Bay in the name of King James I of England and Scotland. With total disregard for the local names given to these places, the Englishmen re-named both Lion's Head and Signal Hill. The name they chose for Lion's Head was "King James, His Mount". Fortunately, the names were never legitimised by the King. When the Dutch subsequently took control of Table Bay and the Cape, they provided their own names: "Leeuwenberg" (Lion Mountain) consisting of "Leeuwenkop" (Lion's Head), "Leeuwenromp" (Lion's Rump, now known as Signal Hill) and "Leeuwenstaart" (Lion's Tail).

An alternative tale of how Lion's Head got its name alludes to the peak being named after the now-extinct black-maned Cape lions, who roamed the area, causing death and destruction. And so the mystery remains - was it, in fact, that people thought the outline of the peak looked like a resting lion? Or was it called Lion's Head because of the notorious Cape winds that roar like lions?



A view of the head of Lion's Head from Table Mountain on a misty day

1. Start
2. Staples & Chains
3. Paragliding Launch Site 1
4. Paragliding Launch Site 2
5. Cannons
6. Summit Ridge
7. Summit (669m)
8. Three Remaining Stone Pine Trees
9. First Steel Ladder
10. Wally's Cave
11. Signal Hill



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Golden Ambitions

Father Guy Tachard, a French astronomer, always believed that there was gold in the Cape. His conviction was eventually validated, but the quantity proved insufficient to sustain a profitable enterprise. In 1886, despite decades of failures, a gold rush occurred, and the Lion's Head Gold Syndicate was formed. Initial gold findings were promising, leading to the creation of the Lion's Head Gold Mining Company in 1887. However, further analysis revealed that the quartz samples contained no gold, leading to liquidation.

The last attempt in 1891 to fill in the Lion's Head shaft marked the end of the gold-rush dreams. A shaft was excavated to a depth of 45 meters on Signal Hill, yielding initial results that were tested at Wilkinson's Mill on Kloof Street—notably, a ton of quartz containing pyrite produced merely two ounces of gold. More than seven tons were dispatched to Britain and Germany for meticulous testing. Unfortunately, the tests were mishandled, delivering an adverse verdict on the presence of gold and consequently discouraging potential investors. Subsequently, the slight depression is all that remains today. Despite subsequent incidents and searches for gold in the area, the real treasure lies in the unique natural beauty of the slopes of Lion's Head, home to one of the world's greatest floral kingdoms, which went largely unnoticed amid the intense passion for mineral wealth.

Hiking Lion's Head

Hiking Lion's Head in Cape Town, South Africa, is one of South Africans' and tourists' most loved pastimes. It is one of the world's most hiked peaks, with an estimated 250,000 people hiking it yearly. Lion's Head is a prominent peak, 669 metres high, nestled between Table Mountain and Signal Hill. It actually qualifies as a mountain, as does any peak more than 305 metres above the surrounding terrain. The hike offers breathtaking, panoramic, constantly changing city views, including the Central Business District, the Atlantic Seaboard, and Camps Bay. Of course, it also provides stunning views of the natural majesty of the Atlantic Ocean, Table Mountain, and the Twelve Apostles. Besides the 360-degree views of Cape Town, another reason the hike is so popular is its convenience. It can be reached within 10 minutes from the city's slopes, and experienced hikers summit in about an hour. It's worth mentioning that the peak boasts the Cape Floral Kingdom of Table Mountain National Park, one of the world's richest floral regions, including plants unique to the Cape Peninsula. You can expect well-marked winding paths, rocky outcrops, and a final scramble to the top.

Although the path can be steep at times, there is a series of chains and ladders to help you navigate the exposed section, but this area can also be bypassed on the left. If you prefer to avoid steep uphill, you can opt for the spiral path that winds around Lion's Head at a gentle incline. If you are walking with children and/or dogs, this Lion's Head Spiral Trail is the best option. It's worth noting that dogs must be on leashes. Lion's Head is a popular spot for sunrise or sunset hikes, especially at full moon when the peak is lit up with lights, resembling a line of ants curving around it.

The hike is 2 to 3 hours up and down, depending on your fitness level, with a distance of 5.5 km for the round trip. The hike starts from the parking area on Signal Hill Road and spirals up, offering benches for admiring the views.

(Please follow the basic safety rules at the end of this page, as the mountain can be dangerous to those who are unprepared or inexperienced)



The Rocky Head of Lion's Head

What to Bring
Charged phone (reception can be spotty)
Water
Warm clothing
Sun protection (hats, sunglasses, sunblock)
Hiking shoes
Snacks
Flashlight/headlamp for full moon hike
A camera for photos!



Stone Stories: A Geological Odyssey of Lion's Head

The geological wonder that is Lion's Head forms part of the Table Mountain National Park, and is a testament to the dynamic forces that shaped the Earth over millions of years. To understand the geological history of Lion's Head is to uncover the ancient tales etched in its rocks.

Like its more massive neighbour, Table Mountain, Lion's Head predominantly comprises Cape Granite. This type of granite is estimated to be around 540 million years old, making it part of the pre-Cambrian era and one of the world's oldest rock formations. Cape Granite's formation resulted from molten rock, or magma, cooling and solidifying deep within the Earth's crust. The granite intruded into the surrounding Malmesbury Shale, a sedimentary rock that is significantly older, dating back over 600 million years. This intrusion, often called a pluton, ultimately led to the uplift and exposure of the granite we see today.

One of the defining features of Lion's Head's geology is the impressive horizontal layering on its slopes. These layers result from the erosion of the overlying rock formations over millions of years, gradually exposing

the granite beneath. Various factors influenced this erosion, including weathering, faulting, and the powerful forces of wind, water, and ice. It is a testament to the immense geological time scales that have shaped Lion's Head into its current form.

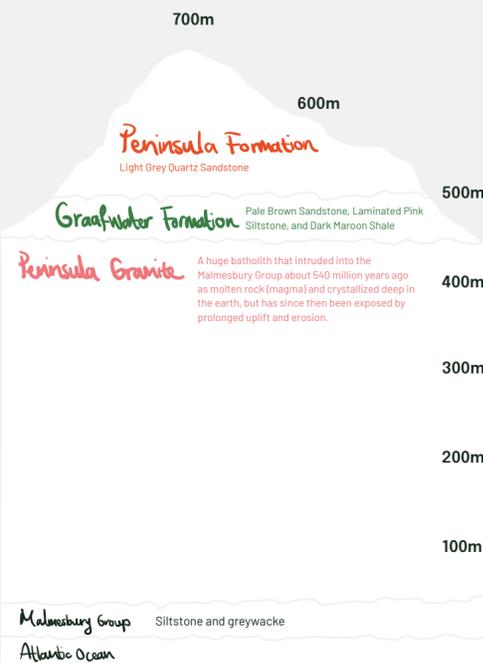
Lion's Head's distinctive shape is also attributed to the geologically significant Cape Fold Belt, a vast geological formation that stretches across southern Africa. The process of folding and faulting in the Cape Fold Belt occurred around 280 million years ago during the late Paleozoic era. This geological event led to the creation of the steeply inclined rock layers and uplifted mountains, including Lion's Head, that define the Cape Peninsula.

A prominent feature of Lion's Head's geology is the dark, iron-rich bands known as diabase dikes. These dikes intrude on the granite rock, creating a visually striking contrast. Diabase dikes are much younger than the granite, formed around 180 million years ago in the early Jurassic period. The origin of these dikes remains a subject of geological study and speculation, with some experts suggesting they may have been associated with tectonic activity and the breakup of the ancient supercontinent, Gondwana.

The geological history of Lion's Head is not just confined to the distant past; it continues to evolve today. Erosion and weathering processes persist,

gradually shaping and changing the mountain's features. The ever-present forces of wind, rain, and temperature fluctuations contribute to the ongoing transformation of this geological wonder.

Lion's Head is an iconic natural landmark and a testament to the Earth's remarkable geological history. Its age, granite composition, layered rock formations, and the influence of the Cape Fold Belt all contribute to its geological uniqueness. Lion's Head stands as a living testament to the intricate and powerful forces that have shaped our planet over millions of years, and it continues to inspire awe in all who visit and study this remarkable geological site.



A view of the Atlantic Seaboard from Lion's Head's Peak

Blossoms Above the Bay

Lion's Head, a prominent peak overlooking Cape Town, South Africa, boasts a rich tapestry of fauna and flora, creating a unique ecosystem that thrives in its diverse landscapes. With over 900 species, of which two-thirds are indigenous to the Cape, the region's biodiversity is a testament to the resilience of life in the face of diverse environmental challenges.

Lion's Head is home to a variety of indigenous plant species adapted to the rugged terrain of the Cape Peninsula. Fynbos, a distinctive vegetation type in the Cape Floral Kingdom, dominates the landscape. This includes a remarkable array of flowering plants such as proteas, ericas, and restios. The vibrant colours and intricate structures of these plants contribute to the visual allure of Lion's Head, especially during the blooming seasons.

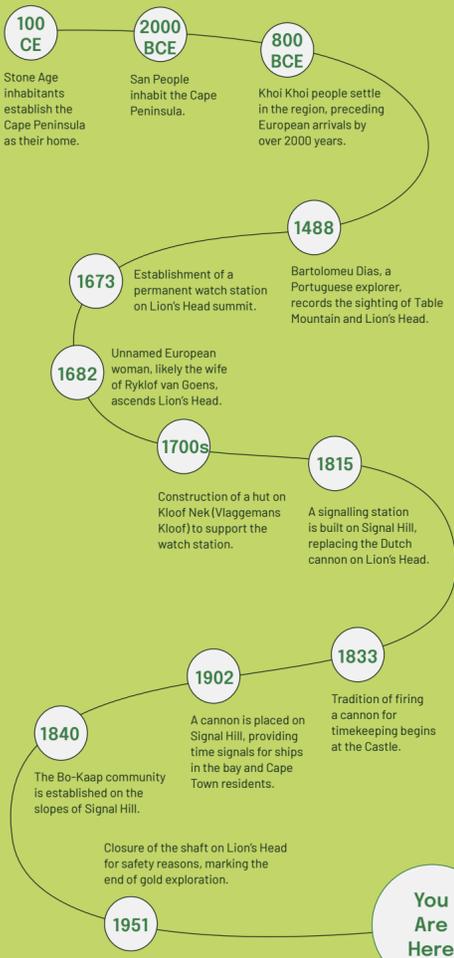
The distinctive silver trees (Leucadendron argenteum) on Lion's Head stand as iconic symbols of the Cape Peninsula's fynbos biome with their shimmering foliage and unique appearance. These endemic trees, adapted to the harsh conditions of the rocky slopes, add a touch of silver elegance to the landscape and are particularly striking against the backdrop of the mountain's rugged terrain.

The presence of Peninsula Shale Renosterveld, another unique vegetation type, adds to the diversity. Here, species like the renosterbos and various grasses find their niche, forming a mosaic of vegetation that supports a wide range of fauna.



A sweet dassie perched on a rock overlooking Clifton

A Timeline of the Past



BASIC SAFETY RULES OF HIKING LION'S HEAD

- Don't hike alone;** four is the ideal number.
- Choose your route carefully and stick to it. Allow yourself enough time – start early. Inform someone of your route and what time you're expected back.
- Choose a hike leader and walk at the pace of the slowest member.
- If lost – **don't split up.** Rather try to retrace your steps. Remember that climbing down is more difficult than climbing up.
- Always take waterproof clothing, even in mid-summer, and wear walking shoes or hiking boots. Wear a hat or cap and sunblock in summer. **Weather changes rapidly.**
- If lost or forced to stop because of bad weather, stay together and remain in one place. Find the closest shelter from wind and rain.
- In case of injury, take time to assess the situation. Then send two people for help and let the third remain with the injured person. If possible, mark the position on a map and send it with those going for help.
- Stick to well-used paths,** which will be indicated on the Park's hiking map and read the warnings on this map. Don't take shortcuts and especially don't wander into ravines.
- Always take enough water,** especially in summer, and food in case of a delay. Watch the weather and time, and turn back before you start running late or if bad weather threatens.
- Take a fully-charged cellphone.** Some parts of the Park do not have cellphone reception, but you will always be able to reach a place where you can use a cellphone more quickly than you'll get to a landline.

Three Rules for Personal Security

As Lion's Head is an urban park, please exercise the same common sense and security precautions that you would anywhere else in the world.

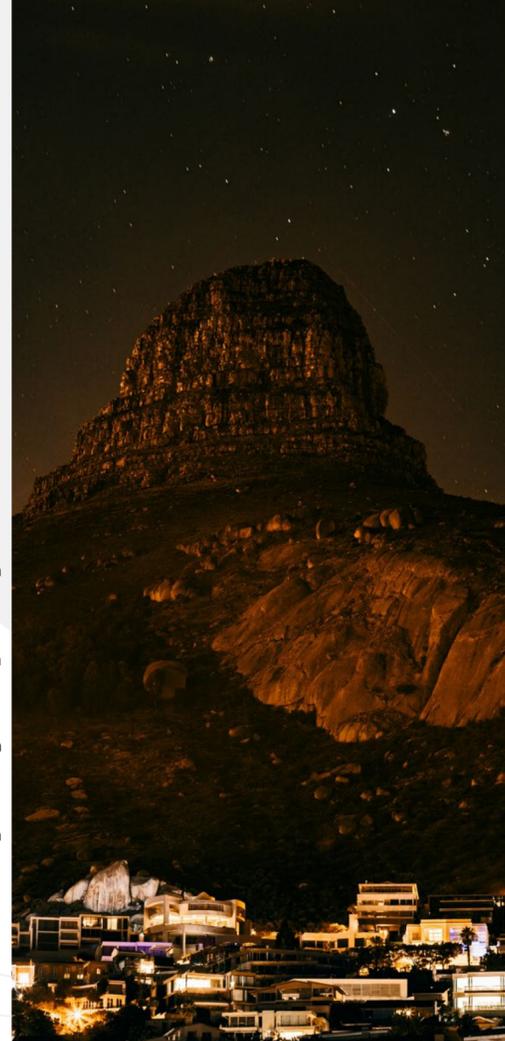
- Do not attract unwanted attention** by openly displaying cash, cameras or other valuables.
- If you are confronted by a criminal, **don't resist.** Hand over your goods as resistance might incite a mugger to violence.
- Program emergency numbers into your cellphone** before your hike.

Emergency Numbers

Main Emergency Telephone: 086 110 6417
 SAPS (South African Police Service): 10111 (021 10111 on mobile)
 Cape Town Emergency Services: +27 (0)21 480 7700
 Cape Town Central OPS Centre: +27 (0)21 467 8002

All of these call centres are primed to respond to incidents on TMNP and investigate suspicious activities.

Other numbers which could come in handy:
 NSRI (National Sea Rescue Institute): 082 911
 Table Mountain Cable Car Company: +27 (0)21 424 0015
 (This safety information is taken from the [South African National Parks](#) website)



ANIMAL SIGHTINGS

Among the most iconic and commonly spotted animals are dassies, or rock hyraxes, which navigate the rocky outcrops with remarkable agility. Their presence is not only a testament to their adaptability but also adds a touch of charm to the landscape. Bird enthusiasts are treated to sightings of sunbirds and sugarbirds, their vibrant plumage contrasting against the blue sky. Raptors, soaring on thermal currents, are a familiar spectacle, offering a captivating display of aerial prowess. Small mammals, including rodents, find refuge in the nooks and crannies of the rocky slopes. Meanwhile, snakes such as the Cape cobra and the puff adder, though elusive, are part of the diverse fauna that calls Lion's Head home.

CONTACT

Ask us to style and plan your unique African adventure!

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73 Loop St, Cape Town City Centre, Cape Town
 +27 (0)76 408 4185
 bookings@gothatway.co.za | hayley@gothatway.co.za
 www.gothatwaycapetown.co.za
 Design and Illustration by Rebecca Hayter | bexstjohn@gmail.com

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