



World's Best Bike Ride?

I recently had the privilege of being invited to celebrate a good friend's birthday party in South Africa with our wives and four other couples. Being a fellow cyclist (we followed the Giro together last year) he suggested that I might like to bring my bike with me, something not always popular with our non-cycling wives!

We stayed in Cape Town at a place called Bantry Bay and much to my surprise did some of the best cycling ever. The highlight was a 70km ride from Cape Town to the tip of the Cape of Good Hope known as Cape Point.

The city of Cape Town is dominated by Table Mountain, which hovers above the city commanding the skyline. There are numerous other peaks such as Lion's Head and somewhat familiarly: The 12 Apostles. Dutch, British and Malay influences have shaped the town over the centuries and combined with the 11 official languages, make for a fascinating mix.

Cape Town has a healthy cycling culture with both road and mountain biking very popular. As in Australia, South Africans at home are just as passionate about sport and fitness. The country is at an exciting time in its history having transitioned from the oppressive apartheid regime to democratic government recently. The people you meet are friendly and welcoming and there is a general feeling of hope and optimism although up to 50% unemployment exists across the country.

This cycle route is predominately coastal

beginning near the centre of Cape Town and follows a road which skirts the water's edge beneath their version of The 12 apostles. The quality of the road surface is good and the motorists not overtly hostile.

The ride takes in Clifton Beach and Camps Bay, which has the obligatory cyclists' coffee shop "Vida e Caffè". Next you cross to Hout Bay and then ascend four kilometres to Chapman's Peak, a definite highlight and very reminiscent of Sydney's West Head. The

four kilometre descent follows a road cut into the cliff face with views that will not fail to impress. The road looks out to sea which on the day we went was postcard blue. It was perfect. The towns of Noordhoek and Fish Hoek are coastal towns along the route. Simon's Town is an historic seaside village where the South African Navy is based and marks the cross over point from the western to the eastern side of the Cape.

The road once again follows the coast

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this time into a strong head wind that at times certainly distracts one's mind from the view. Curiously there were signs warning of baboons though we didn't see any till we entered the Table Mountain National Park (which is nowhere near Table Mountain!). The road then ascended to the main gates of the park. All people entering are charged a 75 Rand entry fee. Even cyclists. This equates to about \$A12, so don't forget some money!

The route then winds its way to Cape Point and the lighthouse marking the tip of the Cape close to the southernmost tip of Africa. Once again the ocean views were spectacular. By then our leave passes had expired and we were collected and transported to lunch, our wives waiting not so patiently.

Whilst in South Africa we visited Robben Island where Mandela was famously held captive for 18 of his 27 years incarceration.

The tour guide was a former prisoner who now amazingly lives on the island in a complex with other former inmates and former prison guards. A tour of the black township Langa was well worthwhile and I recommend a meal at 'Mzoli's' in Gugleto, another township.

A fantastic way to see this area is to enter the Cape Argus Cycle Tour, one of South Africa's largest sportives. Unfortunately I was a week early and missed out, but you can find

details at <http://www.cycletour.co.za>.

South Africa is very keen for tourism as it is estimated that each tourist provides work for five people. The exchange rate with our dollar is favourable at approximately six Australian dollars for each South African Rand.

South Africa can be accessed directly from Sydney or Perth. Internal flights with South African Airways have the added bonus of giving you 20kg extra luggage allowance to carry your bike at no charge. Please take note Australian Airlines!!

In summary South Africa is an excellent cycling destination with ample opportunities for the non-cyclist. 🚲

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